

ECCE HOMO

OR

A CRITICAL INQUIRY INTO THE HISTORY OF
JESUS OF NAZARETH; BEING A RATIONAL
ANALYSIS OF THE GOSPELS

Baron D'Holbach

(Paul Henri Thiry Holbach)

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Andrew Hunwick notes in his 1995 critical edition that the text was "plagiarised" - *adapted* or *elaborated* would be more accurate - from a rare pseudonymous manuscript, "*Histoire critique de Jesus fils de Marie*," attributed to "a Jew, Salvador".

The work was translated into English under the title '*Ecce Homo*' by George Houston (d. 1840), who published three editions: the first in Edinburgh in 1799, the second in London in 1813. For the latter Houston was prosecuted for "blasphemy", sentenced to two years in Newgate Prison and fined two hundred pounds. Following his release, Houston left for New York, where he edited the *Minerva*, founded a Freethought journal, *The Correspondence*, and reprinted (in 1827) his translation.

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INTRODUCTION

Although the writings of the New Testament are in the hands of everyone, nothing is more uncommon than to find the professors of Christianity acquainted with the history or the founder of their religion; and even among those who have perused that history, it is still more rare to find any who have ventured seriously to examine it. It must, indeed, be acknowledged that the ignorance of the one and the want of reflection in the other, on a subject which they nevertheless regard as of infinite importance, may arise from the dislike naturally occasioned by the perusal of the New Testament. In that work there is a confusion, an obscurity and a barbarity of stile, well adapted to confound the ignorant, and to disgust enlightened minds. Scarcely is there a history, ancient or modern, which does not possess more method and clearness than that of Jesus; neither do we perceive that the Holy Spirit, its reputed author, has surpassed, or even equalled many profane historians whose writings are not so important to mankind. The clergy confess that the apostles were illiterate men, and of rough manners; and it does not appear that the Spirit which inspired them troubled itself with correcting their defects. On the contrary, it seems to have adopted them, to have accommodated itself to the weak understandings of its instruments, and to have inspired them with works in which we do not find the judgment, order, or precision, that prevail in many human compositions. Hence, the gospels exhibit a confused assemblage of prodigies, anachronisms,

and contradictions, in which criticism loses itself, and which would make any other book be rejected with contempt.

It is by *mysteries* the mind is prepared to respect religion and its teachers. We are therefore warranted to suspect that an obscurity was designedly given to these writings. In matters of religion, it is prudent never to speak very distinctly. Truths, simple and easily understood, do not strike the imagination in so lively a manner as ambiguous oracles and impenetrable mysteries. Jesus, although come on purpose to enlighten the world, was to be a *stumbling block* to many nations. The small number of the elect, the difficulty of salvation, and the danger of exercising reason, are repeatedly announced in the gospels. Everything seems indeed to demonstrate that God sent his Son to the nations, on purpose to ensnare them, and that they should not comprehend any part of the religion which he meant to promulgate. In this the Eternal appears to have intended to throw mortals into darkness, perplexity, a diffidence of themselves, and a continual embarrassment, obliging them to have recourse to those infallible luminaries, their priests, and to remain forever under the tutelage of the church. Her ministers, we know, claim the exclusive privilege of understanding and explaining the scriptures; and no mortal can expect to obtain future felicity if he does not pay due submission to their decisions.

Thus, it belongs not to the laity to examine religion. On mere inspection of the gospels, every person must be convinced that the book is divine; that every word contained in it is inspired by the Holy Spirit; and that the explanations given by the church of that celestial work, in

like manner, emanate from the Most High. In the first ages of Christianity, those who embraced the religion of Jesus were only the dregs of the people; consequently very simple, unacquainted with letters, and disposed to believe all the wonders anyone chose to announce. Jesus, in his sermons, addressed himself to the vulgar only; he would have intercourse with none but persons of that description; he constantly refused to work miracles in presence of the most clear-sighted of the nation; he declaimed unceasingly against the learned, the doctors, and the rich; against all in whom he could not find the pliability necessary for adopting his maxims. We see him continually extolling poorness of spirit, simplicity and faith.

His disciples, and after them the ministers of the church, have faithfully followed his footsteps; they have always represented faith, or blind submission, as the first of virtues; as the disposition most agreeable to God, and most necessary to salvation. This principle serves for a basis to the Christian religion, and, above all, to the usurpations of the clergy. The preachers, therefore, who succeeded the apostles, employed the greatest care in secreting the gospels from the inspection of all who were not initiated in the mysteries of religion. They exhibited these books to those only whose faith they had tried, and whom they found already disposed to regard them as divine. This mysterious spirit has been transmitted down to our days. In several countries, the laity are interdicted from perusing the scriptures, especially in the Romish communion, whose clergy are best acquainted with governing mankind. The council of Trent has decreed, that "it belongs to the church

alone to decide on the true meaning of the scriptures, and give their interpretation."

It is true the *reading* of the sacred books is permitted, and even recommended to Protestants, who are also enjoined to *examine* their religion. But faith must always precede that reading, and follow that examination; so that before reading, a protestant is bound to believe the gospel to be divine: and the examination of it is permitted only while he finds there what the ministers of his sect have resolved that he shall find. Beyond this, he is regarded as an ungodly man, and often punished for the weakness of his intellect.

The salvation of Christians thus depends neither on the reading nor on the understanding of the sacred books, but on the belief that these books are *divine*. If, unfortunately, the reading or examination of anyone does not coincide with the decisions, interpretations and commentaries of the church, he is in danger of being ruined, and of incurring eternal damnation. To *read* the gospel, he must commence with being disposed blindly to believe all which that book contains; to *examine* the gospel, he must be previously resolved to find nothing there but the holy and the adorable; in fine, to *understand* the gospel, he must entertain a fixed persuasion that the priests can never be themselves deceived, or wish to deceive others in the manner they explain it. "*Believe, (say they,) believe on our words that this book is the work of God himself; if you dare to doubt it, you shall be damned. Are you unable to comprehend anything which God reveals to you there? Believe evermore: God has revealed himself that he may not be understood. — "The glory of God is to conceal his word..." — (Prov. xxv. 2) or rather, by*

speaking in a mysterious manner, does not God intimate that he wishes everyone to refer it to us, to whom he has confided his important secrets? A truth, of which you must not doubt, seeing that we persecute in this world, and damn in the other, whoever dares to question the testimony which we bear to ourselves."

However erroneous this reasoning may appear to those accustomed to think, it is sufficient for the greater part of believers. Where, therefore, they do not read the gospel, or where they do read it, they do not examine it; where they do examine it, it is with prejudiced eyes, and with a determination to find there only what can be conformable to these prejudices, and to the interests of their guides. In consistency with his fears and prepossessions, a Christian conceives himself lost, should he find in the sacred books reason to doubt the veracity of his priests.

With such dispositions, it is no way surprising to see men persisting in their ignorance, and making a merit of rejecting the lights which reason offers them. It is thus, that error is perpetuated, and that nations, in concert with those who deceive them, confer on interested cheats an unbounded confidence in what they regard as of the greatest importance to their own felicity. But the darkness which for so many ages has enveloped the human mind, begins to dissipate. In spite of the tyrannic cares of their jealous guides, mankind seems desirous to burst from the pupillage, wherein so many causes combine to retain them. The ignorance in which the priesthood fostered the credulous, has vanished from among many nations; the despotism of priests is enfeebled in several flourishing states; science has

rendered the mind more liberal; and mankind begin to blush at the ignominious fetters, under which the clergy have so long made both kings and people groan. The human mind is struggling in every country to break in pieces its chains.

Having premised this, we proceed to examine, without any prejudice, the life of Jesus. We shall deduce our facts from the gospels only—memorials revered and acknowledged by the doctors of the Christian religion. To illustrate these facts, we shall employ the aid of criticism. We shall exhibit, in the plainest manner, the conduct, maxims, and policy of an obscure legislator, who, after his death, acquired a celebrity to which he had no pretensions while alive. We shall contemplate in its cradle a religion which, at first, intended for the vilest populace of a nation, the most abject, the most credulous, and the most stupid on earth, became, by little and little, mistress of the Romans, the firebrand of nations, the absolute sovereign of European monarchs; arbiter of the destiny of kingdoms; the cause of their friendship, and of their hate; the cement which serves to strengthen their alliance or their discord; and the leaven always ready to put minds in fermentation. In fine, we shall behold an artizan, a melancholy enthusiast and unskillful juggler, abandoning his profession of a carpenter to preach to men of his own cast; miscarrying in all his projects; himself punished as a public incendiary; dying on a cross; and yet after his death becoming the legislator and the god of many nations, and an object of adoration to beings who pretend to common sense!

If the Holy Spirit had anticipated the transcendent fortune which the religion of Jesus was one day to attain; if

he had foreseen that this religion would be received by kings, civilized nations, scholars, and persons in the higher circles of life; if he had suspected that it would be examined, analyzed, discussed and criticised by logicians; there is reason to believe that he would have left us memoirs less shapeless, facts more circumstantial, proofs more authentic, and materials better digested than those we possess on the life and doctrine of its founder. He would have chosen writers better qualified than those he has inspired, to transmit to nations the speeches and actions of the saviour of the world; he would have made him act and speak on the most trifling point, in a manner more worthy of a god; he would have put in his mouth a language more noble, more perspicuous, and more persuasive; and he would have employed means more certain to convince rebellious reason, and abash incredulity.

Nothing of all this has occurred: **the gospel is merely an eastern romance, disgusting to men of common sense, and obviously addressed to the ignorant, the stupid, and the vulgar - the only persons whom it can mislead.** Criticism finds there no connection of facts, no agreement of circumstances, no illustration of principles, and no uniformity of relation. Four men, unpolished and unlettered, pass for the faithful authors of memoirs containing the life of Jesus; and it is on their testimony that Christians believe themselves bound to receive the religion they profess; and adopt, without examination, the most contradictory facts, the most incredible actions, the most amazing prodigies, the most unconnected system, the most unintelligible doctrines, and the most revolting mysteries!

Victor of Tunis informs us that, in the sixth century, the Emperor Anastasius "*caused the gospels to be corrected, as works composed by fools.*" 'The Elements' of Euclid are intelligible to all who endeavor to understand them; they excite no dispute among geometers. Is it so with the Bible? and do its *revealed* truths occasion no disputes among divines? By what fatality have writings revealed by God himself still need of commentaries? and why do they demand additional lights from on high, before they can be believed or understood? *Is it not astonishing that what was intended as a guide to mankind should be wholly above their comprehension? Is it not cruel that what is of most importance to them should be least known?* All is mystery, darkness, uncertainty, and matter of dispute, in a religion intended by the Most High to enlighten the human race. *In fact, God is everywhere represented in the bible as a seducer.* He permitted Eve to be *seduced* by a serpent. He hardened the heart of Pharaoh; and the prophet Jeremiah distinctly accuses him of being a deceiver.

Supposing, however, that the gospels were in reality written by apostles or disciples of apostles, should it not follow from this alone that their testimony ought to be suspected? Could not men who are described as illiterate, and destitute of talents, be themselves deceived? Could not enthusiasts and credulous fanatics imagine that they had seen many things which never existed, and thus become the dupes of deception? Whoever has perused the ancient historians, particularly Herodotus, Plutarch, Livy, and Josephus, must admit the force of this reasoning. These writers, with a pious credulity similar to that of Christians,

relate prodigies pregnant with absurdities, which they themselves pretended to have witnessed, or were witnessed by others. Among the wonders that appeared at Rome, some time before the triumvirate, many statues of the Gods sweat blood and water; and there was an Ox which spoke. Under the empire of Caligula, the statue of Jupiter Olympus burst forth into such loud fits of laughter that those who were taking it down to carry to Rome abandoned their work and fled in terror. A crow prognosticated misfortune to Domitian, and an Owl paid the same compliment to Herod.

Moreover, could not impostors, strongly attached to a sect by which they subsisted, and which, therefore, they had an interest to support, attest miracles, and publish statements with the falsehood of which they were well acquainted? and could not the first Christians, by a *pious fraud*, afterwards add or retrench things essential to the works ascribed to the apostles? We know that Origen, so early as the third century, complained loudly of the corruption of manuscripts. "*What shall we say (exclaims he) of the errors of transcribers, and of the impious temerity with which they have corrupted the text? What shall we say of the licence of those who promiscuously interpolate or erase at their pleasure?*" These questions form warrantable prejudices against the persons to whom the gospels have been ascribed, and against the purity of their text.

It is also extremely difficult to ascertain whether those books belong to the authors whose names they bear. In the first ages of Christianity, there were a great number of gospels, different from one another and composed for the use of different churches and sects of Christians. The truth

of this has been confessed by ecclesiastical historians of the greatest credit. (Tillemont, tom. ii. 47, etc. Epiphanius. Homil. 84. Dodwell's Dissert. on Irenaeus, p. 66. Freret's Examen Critique. Codex Apocryphus, etc.) There is, therefore, reason to suspect that the persons who composed the acknowledged gospels might, with the view of giving them more weight, have attributed them to apostles or disciples, who actually had no share in them. That idea, once adopted by ignorant and credulous Christians, might be transmitted from age to age, and pass at last for certainty, in times when it was no longer possible to ascertain the authors or the facts related.

Among some fifty gospels, with which Christianity in its commencement was inundated, the church, assembled in Council at Nice, chose four of them, and rejected the rest as *apocryphal*, although the latter had nothing more ridiculous in them than those which were chosen. Thus, at the end of three centuries, (*i.e.* in 325 C.E.) some bishops decided that these four gospels were the only ones which ought to be adopted, or which had been *inspired* by the Holy Spirit. A miracle enabled them to discover this important truth, so difficult to be discerned at a time even then not very remote from that of the apostles. They placed, it is said, promiscuously, *apocryphal* and *authentic* books under an altar: the Fathers of the Council betook themselves to prayer in order to induce the Lord to permit the false or doubtful books to remain *under* the altar, whilst those which were truly inspired should place themselves above it—a circumstance which did not fail to occur. It is then on this miracle that the faith of Christians depends! It is to it that

they owe the assurance of possessing the true gospels, or faithful memoirs of the life of Jesus! It is from these only they are permitted to deduce the principles of their belief, and the rule of conduct which they ought to observe in order to obtain eternal salvation!

Thus, the authenticity of the books [Gospels] which are the basis of the Christian religion is founded solely on the authority of a Council composed of priests and bishops. But these bishops and priests, judges and parties in an affair wherein they were obviously interested, could they not be themselves deceived? Independently of the pretended miracle which enabled them to distinguish the true gospels from the false, had they any sign by which they could clearly distinguish the writings they ought to receive from those which they ought to reject? Some will tell us that the church, assembled in a general council, is *infallible*, that then the Holy Spirit inspires it, and that its decisions ought to be regarded as those of God himself. If we demand, where is the proof of this infallibility?, it will be answered that the gospel assures it, and that Jesus has promised to assist and enlighten his church until the consummation of ages. Here the incredulous reply that the church, or its ministers, create rights to themselves; for it is their own authority which establishes the authenticity of books whereby that authority is established. This is obviously a circle of errors. In short, an assembly of bishops and priests has decided that the books which attribute to themselves an infallible authority, have been divinely inspired!

Notwithstanding this decision, there still remain some difficulties on the authenticity of the gospels. In the *first*

place, it may be asked whether the decision of the Council of Nice, composed of three hundred and eighteen bishops, ought to be regarded as that of the universal church. Were all who formed that assembly entirely of the same opinion? Were there no disputes among these men inspired by the Holy Spirit? Was their decision unanimously accepted? Had not the authority of Constantine a chief share in the adoption of the decrees of that celebrated council? In this case, was it not the imperial power, rather than the spiritual authority, which decided the authenticity of the gospels?

In the *second* place, many theologians agree that the universal church, although infallible in doctrine, may err in *facts*. Now it is evident that in the case alluded to, the doctrine depends on fact. Indeed, before deciding whether the doctrines contained in the gospels were divine, it was necessary to know whether the gospels themselves were written by the inspired authors to whom they are ascribed. This is obviously a *fact*. It was further necessary to know whether the gospels had never been altered, mutilated, augmented, interpolated, or falsified, by the different hands through which they had passed in the course of three centuries. This is likewise a *fact*. Can the fathers of the church guarantee the probity of all the depositaries of those writings, and the exactness of all the transcribers? Can they decide definitively that, during so long a period, none could insert in these memoirs, marvelous relations or dogmas, unknown to their supposed authors? Does not ecclesiastical history inform us that, in the origin of Christianity, there were schisms, disputes, heresies, and sects without number, and that each of the disputants founded his opinion on the

gospels? Even in the time of the Council of Nice, do we not find that the whole church was divided on the fundamental article of the Christian religion – the divinity of Jesus?

Thus it is seen that the Council of Nice was the true founder of Christianity, which, till then, wandered at random, did not acknowledge Jesus to be God, had no authentic gospels, was without a fixed law, and had no code of doctrine whereon to rely. A number of bishops and priests, but very few in comparison of those who composed the whole Christian church, and these bishops in no way unanimous, decided on the points most essential to the salvation of nations. They decided on the divinity of Jesus; on the authenticity of the Gospels; that, according to these, their own authority ought to be deemed infallible. In a word, they decided on the sum total of faith! Nevertheless, their decisions might have remained without force if they had not been supported by the authority of **Constantine**. This prince gave prevalence to the opinion of the fathers of the Council, who knew how to draw him, for a time, to their own side, and who, amidst this multitude of gospels and writings, did not fail to declare those *divine* which they judged most conformable to their own opinions, or to the ruling faction. In religion as in other things, the reasoning of the *strongest* party is always the best.

Behold, then, the authority of an emperor who determines the chief points of the Christian religion! This emperor, unsettled in his own faith, decides that Jesus is consubstantial with the Father, and compels his subjects to receive as inspired the four gospels we have in our hands. It is in these memoirs, adopted by a few bishops in the

Council of Nice, by them attributed to apostles or unexceptionable persons inspired by the Holy Spirit, by them proposed to serve as an indispensable rule to Christians, that we are to seek for the materials of our history. We shall state them with fidelity; we shall compare and connect their discordant relations; we shall see if the facts which they detail are worthy of God, and calculated to procure to mankind the advantages which they expect. This inquiry will enable us to judge rightly of the Christian religion, of the degree of confidence we ought to place in it, of the esteem we ought to entertain for its lessons and doctrines, and of the idea we should form of Jesus, its founder.

Though, in composing this history, we have laid it down as a rule to employ the gospels only, we presume not to flatter ourselves that it will please everybody, or that the clergy will adopt our labors. The connections we shall form, the interpretations we shall give, the animadversions we shall present to our readers, will not always be entirely agreeable to the views of our spiritual guides, the greater part of whom are enemies to all inquiry. To such men we would state that criticism gives a lustre to truth, that to reject all examination is to acknowledge the weakness of their cause, and that not to wish for discussion is to avow it to be incapable of sustaining a trial.

If they tell us that our ideas are repugnant to the decisions of councils, of the fathers, and of the universal church; to this we shall answer that, according to their own books, *opposition* is not always a crime; we shall plead the example of an apostle, to whom the Christian religion is

under the greatest obligations — what do we say! — to whom alone, perhaps, it owes its existence. Now this apostle boasts of having *withstood* the great St. Peter to his face, that visible head of the church, appointed by Jesus himself to feed his flock, and whose infallibility is at least as probable as that of his successors.

If they charge us with *innovation*, we shall plead the example of Jesus himself, who was regarded as an *innovator* by the Jews, and who was a martyr for the reform he intended to introduce. If the opinions be unacceptable, the author, as he has no pretensions to divine inspiration, leaves to everyone the liberty of rejecting or receiving his interpretations and method of investigation. He does not threaten with eternal torments those who resist his arguments; he has not credit enough to promise heaven to such as [those who] yield to them; he pretends neither to constrain, nor to seduce those who do not think as he does. He is desirous only to calm the mind, allay animosity, and sooth the passions of those zealots who are ever ready to harass and destroy their fellow creatures on account of opinions which may not appear equally convincing to all the world. He promises to point out the ridiculous cruelty of those men of blood who persecute for dogmas which they themselves do not understand. He ventures to flatter himself that such as [those who] peruse this inquiry with coolness will acknowledge that it is very possible to doubt the inspiration of the gospels, and of the divine mission of Jesus, without ceasing to be a rational and honest man.

Such as [Those who] are exasperated against this work are entreated to remember that faith is a gift of heaven, that

the want of it is not a vice, that if the Jews, who were eye witnesses of the wonders of Jesus, did not believe them, it is very pardonable to doubt them at the beginning of the nineteenth century, especially on finding that the accounts of these marvels, though said to have been inspired by the Holy Spirit, are not uniform nor in harmony with each other. In fine, fiery devotees are earnestly entreated to moderate their holy rage, and suffer the meekness, so often recommended by their "*divine Saviour*" to occupy the place of that bitter zeal, and persecuting spirit which creates so many enemies to the Christian religion. Let them remember that if it was to patience and forbearance Jesus promised the possession of the earth, it is much to be feared that pride, intolerance and inhumanity will render the ministers of the church detestable, and make them lose that empire over minds, which to them is so agreeable. If they wish to reign over rational men, they must display reason, knowledge and, above all, virtues more useful than those wherewith the teachers of the gospel have so long infested society. Jesus has said, "*Happy are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth,*" unless indeed interpreters should pretend that this only signifies the necessity of persecuting, exterminating and cutting the throats of those whose affections they wish to gain.

If it were permitted to cite the maxims of a profane person by that of the Son of God, we would quote here the apophthegm of the profound Machiavel that "*empires are preserved by the same means whereby they are established.*" *It was by meekness, patience and precaution that the disciples of Jesus are said to have at first established Christianity.*

Their successors employed violence, but not until they found themselves supported by devout tyrants. Since then, the gospel of peace has been the signal of war; the pacific disciples of Jesus have become implacable warriors, have treated each other as ferocious beasts; and the church has been perpetually torn by dissensions, schisms and factions. If the primitive spirit of patience and meekness does not quickly return to the aid of religion, it will soon become the object of the hatred of nations who begin to feel that morality is preferable to obscure dogmas, and that peace is of greater value than the holy frenzy of the ministers of the gospel.

We cannot, therefore, with too much earnestness exhort them, for their own sakes, to moderation. Let them imitate their divine Master, who never employed his Father's power to exterminate the Jews, of whom he had so much to complain. He did not make the armies of heaven descend in order to establish his doctrine. He chose rather to surrender to the secular power than give up the infidels whom his prodigies and transcendent reasoning could not convince. Though he is represented as being the depositary of the power of the Most High; though he was inspired by the Holy Spirit; though he had at his command all the angels of paradise, we do not find that he performed any miracles on the understandings of his auditory. He suffered them to remain in their blindness, though he had come on purpose to enlighten them. We cannot doubt that a conduct, so wise, was intended to make the pastors of his church (who are not possessed of more persuasive powers than their master) sensible that it is not by violence they can reconcile the

mind to incredible things; and that it would be unjust to force others to comprehend what, without favor from above, it would be impossible for themselves to comprehend, or what, even with such favor, they but very imperfectly understand.

But it is time to conclude an introduction, perhaps, already too long to a work which, even without preamble, may be tiresome to the clergy, and irritate the temper of the devout. The author does himself the justice to believe that he has written enough to be attacked by a host of writers, obliged by situation to repel his blows, and to defend, right or wrong, a cause wherein they are so deeply interested. He calculates that, on his death, his book, as well as his reputation, will be calumniated, and his arguments misrepresented or mutilated. He expects to be treated as impious—a blasphemer—an atheist, and to be loaded with all the epithets which the pious are in use to lavish on those who disquiet them. He will not, however, sleep the less tranquil for that; but as his sleep may prevent him from replying, he thinks it his duty to inform his antagonists beforehand that *injuries are not reasons*. He does more—he bequeaths them charitable advice, to which the defenders of religion do not usually pay sufficient attention. They are then apprised that if, in their learned refutations, they do not resolve completely *all* the objections brought against them, they will have done nothing for their cause. The defenders of a religion, in which it is affirmed that everything is divinely inspired, are bound not to leave a single argument behind, and ought to be convinced that *answering* to an argument is not always refuting it. They

should please also to keep in remembrance that a single falsehood, a single absurdity, a single contradiction or a single blunder, fairly pointed out in the gospels, is sufficient to render suspected, and even to overturn the authority of a book which ought to be perfect in all its parts, if it be true that it is the work of an infinitely perfect Being. An incredulous person, being but a man, may reason wrong; but it is never permitted to a God, or his instruments, either to contradict themselves or to talk nonsense.

CHAPTER I

ACCOUNT OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE AND THEIR PROPHETS – INQUIRY INTO THE PROPHECIES RELATING TO JESUS

However slightly we cast our eyes over the history of the Jews, as contained in their sacred books, we are forced to acknowledge that these people were at all times the blindest, the most stupid, the most credulous, the most superstitious, and the silliest that ever appeared on earth. Moses, by dint of miracles, or delusions, succeeded in subjugating the Israelites. After having liberated them from the iron rod of the Egyptians, he put them under his own. This celebrated legislator had evidently the intention to subject the Hebrews for ever to his purposes, and, after himself, to render them the slaves of his family and tribe. It is obvious that the mosaical economy had no other object than to deliver up the people of Israel to the tyranny and extortions of priests and Levites. This the law, which was promulgated in the name of the Eternal, authorised to

devour the rest of the nation, and to crush them under an insupportable yoke. The chosen people of God were destined solely to be the prey of the priesthood, to satiate their avarice and ambition, and to become the instrument and victim of their passions.

Hence, by the law, and by the policy of the priests, the people of God were kept in a profound ignorance, in an abject superstition, in an unsocial and savage aversion for the rest of mankind, in an inveterate hatred of other forms of worship, and in a barbarous and sanguinary intolerance towards every foreign religion. All the neighbors of the Hebrews were, therefore, their enemies. If the holy nation was the object of the love of the most high, it was an object of contempt and horror to all who had occasion to know it—a fact admitted by their own historian Josephus. For this it was indebted to its religious institutions, to the labors of its priests, to its diviners and its prophets, who continually profited by its credulity, in displaying wonders and kindling its delirium.

Under the guidance of Moses, and of generals or judges who governed them afterwards, the Jewish people distinguished themselves only by massacres, unjust wars, cruelties, usurpations, and infamies, which were enjoined them in the name of the Eternal. Weary of the government of their priests, which drew on them misfortunes and bloody defeats, the descendants of Abraham demanded kings; but, under these, the state was perpetually torn with disputes between the priesthood and the government. Superstition aimed at ruling over policy. Prophets and priests pretended to reign over kings, of whom such as

[those who] were not sufficiently submissive to the interpreters of heaven were renounced by the Lord, and, from that moment, unacknowledged and opposed by their own subjects. Fanatics and impostors, absolute masters of the understandings of the nation, were continually ready to rouse it, and excite in its bosom the most terrible revolutions. It was the intrigues of the prophets that deprived Saul of his crown, and bestowed it on David, *the man according to God's own heart*—that is to say, devoted to the will of the priests. It was the prophets who, to punish the defection of Solomon in the person of his son, occasioned the separation of the kingdoms of Judea and Israel. It was the prophets who kept these two kingdoms continually at variance, weakened them by means of each other, desolated them by religious and fatal wars, conducted them to complete ruin, a total dispersion of their inhabitants, and a long captivity among the Assyrians.

So many calamities did not open the eyes of the Jews, who continued obstinate in refusing to acknowledge the true source of their misfortunes. Restored to their homes by the bounty of Cyrus, they were again governed by priests and prophets whose maxims rendered them turbulent, and drew on them the hatred of sovereigns who subdued them. The Greek princes treated with the greatest severity a people whom the oracles and promises of their prophets rendered always rebellious and ungovernable. The Jews, in fine, became the prey of the Romans, whose yoke they bore with fear, against whom impostors often incited them to revolt, and who, at last, tired of their frequent rebellions, entirely destroyed them as a nation.

Such, in a few words, is the history of the Jewish people. It presents the most memorable examples of the evils which fanaticism and superstition produce; for it is evident that the continual revolutions, bloody wars, and total destruction of that nation, had no other cause than its unwearied credulity, its submission to priests, its enthusiasm, and its furious zeal, excited by the inspired. On reading the Old Testament, we are forced to confess that the people of God (thanks to the roguery of their spiritual guides) were, beyond contradiction, the most unfortunate people that ever existed. Yet the most solemn promises of Jehovah seemed to assure to that people a flourishing and puissant empire. God had made an eternal alliance with Abraham and his posterity, but the Jews, far from reaping the fruits of this alliance, and far from enjoying the prosperity they had been led to expect, lived continually in the midst of calamities, and were, more than all other nations, the sport of frightful revolutions. So many disasters, however, were incapable of rendering them more considerate; the experience of so many ages did not hinder them from relying on oracles so often contradicted; and the more unfortunate they found themselves, the more rooted were they in their credulity. The destruction of their nation could not bring them to doubt the excellence of their law, of the wisdom of their institutions, or of the veracity of their prophets who successively relieved each other, either in menacing them in the name of the Lord or in re-animating their frivolous hopes.

Strongly convinced that they were the sacred and chosen people of the Most High, alone worthy of his favors, the

Jews, in spite of all their miseries, were continually persuaded that their God could not have abandoned them. They, therefore, constantly looked for an end to their afflictions, and promised themselves a deliverance which obscure oracles had led them to expect. Building on these fanatical notions, they were at all times disposed to listen with avidity to every man who announced himself as *inspired* by heaven; they eagerly ran after every singular personage who could feed their expectations; they followed whoever had the secret of astonishing them by impostures, which their stupidity made them consider supernatural works and unquestionable signs of divine power. Disposed to see the marvellous in the most trifling events, every adroit impostor was on the watch to deceive them, and was certain of making more or less adherents, especially among the populace who are everywhere destitute of experience and knowledge.

It was in the midst of a people of this disposition that the personage appeared whose history we write. He very soon found followers in the most despicable of the rabble. Seconded by these, he preached, as usual, *reformation* to his fellow citizens; he wrought wonders; he styled himself the envoy of the Divinity. He particularly founded his mission on vague, obscure, and ambiguous predictions, contained in the sacred books of the Jews, which he applied to himself. He announced himself as the *messiah* or messenger, the deliverer of Israel, who for so many ages was the object of the nation's hope. His disciples, his apostles, and afterwards their successors, found means to apply to their master the ancient prophecies, wherein he seemed the least perceptibly

designed. The Christians, docile and full of faith, have had the good fortune to see the founder of their religion predicted in the clearest manner throughout the whole Old Testament. By dint of allegories, figures, interpretations and commentaries, their doctors have brought them to see, in this shapeless compilation, all that they had an interest in pointing out to them. When passages taken literally did not countenance deceit agreeably to their views, they contrived for them a two-fold sense: they pretended that it was not necessary to understand them literally, but to give them a mystical, allegorical, and spiritual meaning. To explain these pretended predictions, they continually substituted one name for another; they rejected the literal meaning in order to adopt a figurative one; they changed the most natural signification of words they applied the same passages to events quite opposite; they retrenched the names of some personages plainly designed, in order to introduce that of Jesus; and, in all this, they did not blush to make the most crying abuse of the principles of language.

The third chapter of Genesis furnishes a striking example of the manner in which the doctors of the Christian religion have allegorized passages of scripture, in order to apply them to Jesus. In this chapter, God says to the serpent, convicted of having seduced the woman, '*the seed of the woman shall bruise thy head*'. This prophesy appears with so much the more difficulty to apply to Jesus, that these words follow—'*and thou shalt bruise his heel*'. We do not comprehend why the *seed of the woman* must be understood as Jesus. If he was the Son of God, or God himself, he could not be produced from the *seed of the woman*. If he was man,

he is not pointed out in a particular manner by these words, for all men, without exception, are produced from the *seed of women*. According to our interpreters, the serpent is sin, and the seed of the woman that bruises it is Jesus incarnate in the womb of Mary. Since the coming of Jesus, however, sin, typified by the serpent, has at all times existed; from which we are led to conclude that Jesus has not destroyed it, and that the prediction is neither literally nor allegorically accomplished.

In the twenty-second chapter of Genesis, God promises to Abraham that in his seed *all the nations of the earth shall be blessed*. What we style prosperity, the Hebrews termed blessings. If Abraham and his race enjoyed prosperity, it was only for a short period; the Hebrews became afterwards the slaves of the Egyptians, and were, as has been seen, the most unfortunate people on earth. Christians have also given a mystic sense to this prophecy:—they substitute the name of Jesus for that of Abraham, and it is in him that all the nations shall be blessed. The advantages they shall enjoy will be persecutions, calamities, and misfortunes of every kind; and his disciples, like himself, shall undergo the most painful punishments. Hence we see that, following our interpreters, the word *blessing* has changed its meaning; it no longer implies prosperity; it signifies what, in ordinary language, is termed curses, disasters, afflictions, troubles, divisions, and religious wars—calamities with which the Christian nations have been continually *blessed* since the establishment of the church.

Christians believe that they see Jesus announced in the 49th chapter of Genesis. The patriarch Jacob there promises

sovereign power to Judah. "*The sceptre (says he) shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.*" It is thus that several interpreters translate the tenth verse of the 49th chapter of Genesis. Others have translated it thus, "*the authority shall forever be in Judah when the Messiah shall have come.*" Others read, "*The authority shall be in Judah till the messenger receive in Shiloh the sovereign power.*" Others again render the passage in this manner, "*the people of Judah shall be in affliction till the messenger of the Lord comes to put an end to it;*" and according to others, "*till the city of Shiloh be destroyed.*"

This diversity in the translation of the same passage ought, unquestionably, to render the prophecy very suspicious. First, we see that it is impossible to determine the signification of the word *Shiloh*, or to ascertain whether it be the name of a man or a city? Secondly, it is proved by the sacred books, received equally by Jew and Christians, that the sovereign power is gone from Judah, was wholly annihilated during the Babylonish captivity, and has not been re-established since. If it is pretended that Jesus came to restore the power of Judah, we assert, on the contrary, that, in the time of Jesus, Judah was without authority, for Judah had submitted to the Romans. But our doctors have again recourse to allegory:—according to them, the power of Judah was the spiritual power of Jesus over Christians, designated by Judah.

They, in like manner, see Jesus foretold by Balaam, who by the bye was a false prophet. He thus expresses himself: (Numbers xxiv 16) — "*He hath said, who heard the words of God,*

and knew the knowledge of the Most High, who saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: I shall see him but not now; I shall behold him but not nigh; there shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel," etc. In this unintelligible jargon, they pretend to show Christians a clear prediction of the founder of their religion. It is he who is the star, because his luminous doctrine enlightens all minds. '*This sceptre which shall rise out of Israel*', is the cross of Jesus, by the aid of which he has triumphed over the Devil, who, in spite of this victory, ceases not to reign on earth, and to render useless the triumph of the Son of God.

But of all the prophecies contained in the Old Testament, there is not one to which the Christian doctors have attached more importance than that found in Isaiah chap. vii. 14: '*A young woman shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel*'. To find out Jesus in this prediction, it is, first of all, necessary to be convinced that this woman is *Mary*; next, it is necessary to ascertain that *Immanuel* is the same with Jesus. It will always be objected against this pretended prophecy that it is sufficient to read the chapter of Isaiah whence the passage is taken, to be satisfied that the prophet had in view Ahaz- king of Judah. This prince is there represented as in consternation, on account of the arrival of Rezin and Pekah, kings of Syria and Israel, who, with their united armies, threatened his dominions. Isaiah encouraged him by representing that he still had forces sufficient, and promised him the assistance of the Lord, whom every prophet made to be of his own party. To guarantee his promises, Isaiah told his sovereign

that he had only to ask of him a sign. The dispirited prince replied that he did not wish to tempt the Lord. The prophet, however, wishing to convince him, announced a sign – "*A young woman shall conceive, and bring forth a son, who shall be called Immanuel.*" Now the following chapter informs us who this young woman was: she was the wife of Isaiah himself. – "*I took unto me (says he) faithful witnesses; and I went unto the 'prophetess', and she conceived and bare a son.*" The simple inspection of this text evidently shows that it is in no respect applicable to Jesus. If what is recorded in 2 Chron. c. v. be true, the prophecy was not even accomplished, but the reverse of its fulfilment took place. Instead of Ahaz defeating his enemies, as Isaiah promised he would, his whole army was routed, 120,000 killed, and 200,000 carried into captivity by the kings of Syria and Israel. It is evident, then, that this famous sign of "*a young woman shall conceive,*" served only in the first instance to *deceive* the king of Judah, and has since been employed to *mislead* those who, like that king, relied on the professions of priests and prophets.

Proceeding forward in the perusal of Isaiah (chap. ix. 6), we find the following passage: – "*Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder.*" If the child foretold by Isaiah was born in his time, it can no longer be said that the prophet meant to speak of Jesus, who was born several centuries after him; for the birth of that person being so distant, could not be a sign of deliverance to Ahaz, as his enemies pressed so closely upon him. To this it is answered that the prophets spoke of future events as if they were past or present; but this answer requires to be established by proof. It is likewise said that the birth of

Isaiah's son was only a type of that of Jesus; for to him, it is affirmed, is applicable "*the government on the shoulder*," in which our doctors perceive distinctly pointed out the cross that Jesus carried on his shoulders when going to Calvary. Our interpreters have thus the happiness of seeing the sign of dominion, or empire, in what appears to eyes less enlightened, the sign of punishment, weakness, and slavery.

It is proper also to inquire why it is said, in the Christian system, that it is not necessary a prophecy have relation, in all its parts, to the subject or fact to which it is applied. The sacred writers do not mean to cite a whole prophecy, but only a passage, a detached phrase, or often a single word, apposite to the subject they treat of, without troubling themselves whether what precedes or what follows their quotation has connexion or not with what they are speaking of. In the example under discussion, Matthew, wishing to quote Isaiah and apply a prophecy to Jesus, takes of this prophecy these detached words only, '*A young woman shall conceive*', —he stood in need of no more of it. According to that Evangelist, Mary had conceived:—Isaiah had said that a girl, or woman, should conceive. Matthew therefore concluded that the conception of Jesus was foretold by Isaiah. This vague connection is sufficient for all Christians who, like Matthew, believe they see their founder pointed out in prophecy.

Following this strange method, they have referred to Isaiah to prove that Jesus was the messiah promised to the Jews. In the 53rd chapter, this prophet describes in a very pathetic manner the misfortunes and sufferings of his brother Jeremiah. The clergy have long labored to apply

that prophecy to Jesus: they have distinctly seen him pointed out in the "*man of sorrows*" so that it is regarded rather as a faithful and circumstantial narrative of the passion of Jesus than as a prediction. But, agreeably to sound criticism, this history relates only to Jeremiah. Not to deprive themselves, however, of the resources so useful a passage might furnish, they have decided that, in the case of prophecies, the indirect relation should have place. By this means, in admitting that the narrative of Isaiah had Jeremiah for its object, they maintained that Jeremiah was a figure or type of Jesus. It is not that their lives were strictly consentaneous; but, in the Christian religion, conformity followed by affinities is not absolutely requisite to the justice of the comparison.

This manner of reasoning, peculiar to the Christian religion, has been very convenient for it. Paul especially, like most of the first preachers of Christianity, and after them the fathers and doctors of the church, employed this curious method of proving their system. According to them, all under the ancient law was the image of the new; and the most celebrated personages in the Old Testament typified Jesus and his church. Abel, assassinated by his brother, was a prophetic figure of Jesus put to death by the Jews. The sacrifice of Isaac, which was not accomplished, was the image of that accomplished on the cross. The relations or predictions which had for their object Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Jeremiah, Zorobabel, or other ancient personages, were applied to Jesus. His death was represented by the blood of he-goats and of bulls. By aid of these allegories, the books of the Jews

served only to announce the events in the life of Jesus, and the history of the establishment of his religion. In this manner it is easy to find in the scriptures whatever we desire.

It would be useless to investigate the famous prophecy of the seventy weeks of Daniel, in which the Christian doctors believe they see the coming of Jesus clearly announced. It is true that, if Daniel or his editors had specified the nature of these *weeks*, they would have prevented much trouble to interpreters: this prediction might then have been a great resource to Christianity. The ablest critics, however, declare that they are greatly embarrassed when attempting to fix the commencement and the end of these weeks. On this they are never unanimous, nor can they agree on a precise date, which hitherto is wanting to the great event of the coming of the messiah. We know the Jews made use of weeks of days, weeks of weeks, and weeks of years. It is by a conjecture, merely hazarded, they advance in the bible of Louvain, that the weeks mentioned in Daniel are weeks of years. Yet that supposition throws light on nothing, for the chronological table which the doctors of Louvain have published gives only three hundred and forty-three years intervening between the time when they make the weeks to commence and the death of Jesus. Many have believed that this prediction was subsequently added to the text of Daniel, in favor of Jonathan Maccabeus. We may judge of the little credit that can be given to this prophecy, from the prodigious number of commentaries that have been made on it.

CHAPTER II

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

All the prophecies contained in the sacred books of the Jews coincide in making them hope for the return of the favor of the Almighty. God had promised them a deliverer, a messenger, a messiah, who should restore the power of Israel. That deliverer was to be of the seed of David, the prince *according to God's own heart*, so submissive to the priests and so zealous for religion. It was to recompense the devotion and docility of this holy usurper that the prophets and the priests, loaded with kindness, promised him, in the name of heaven, that his family should reign forever. If that famous prediction was belied during the Babylonish captivity and at subsequent periods, the Jews, at this time no less credulous than their ancestors, persuaded themselves that it was impossible for their prophets and diviners to deceive them. They imagined that their oracles sooner or later would be accomplished, and that they should see a descendant of David restore the honor of their nation.

It was in conformity to these predictions and popular notions that the writers of the Gospels gave Jesus a genealogy, by which they tried to prove that he was descended in a direct line from David, and consequently, had a right to arrogate the character of *messiah*. Nevertheless, criticism has exhausted itself on this genealogy. Such as [Those who] are not possessed of faith have been surprised to find that the Holy Spirit has dictated it differently to the two evangelists who have detailed it: for,

the genealogy given by Matthew is not the same with that of Luke: a disparity which has thrown Christian interpreters into embarrassments, from which all their subtlety has hitherto been unable to rescue them. They tell us that one of these genealogies is that of Joseph; but, supposing Joseph to be of the race of David, a Christian cannot believe that he was the real father of Jesus because his religion enjoins him to believe steadfastly that he is the Son of God. Supposing the two genealogies to be Mary's, in that case the Holy Spirit has blundered in one of them. Even Matthew's account is contradictory of itself. He says (c. i. v. 17) "*To all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.*" On enumerating the names given in the last division of time, we find only *twelve* generations, even including Joseph. In whatever way we consider them, one of the genealogies will always appear faulty and incomplete, and the extraction of Jesus very weakly established.

Let us now examine the occurrences which preceded and accompanied the birth of Jesus. Only one evangelist has particularly narrated them; all the others have superficially passed over circumstances as marvellous as they are important. Matthew, content with his genealogy, speaks but in few words of the preternatural manner wherein Jesus was formed in the womb of his mother. The speech of an angel, seen in a dream, suffices to convince Joseph of the virtue of his wife, and he adopts her child without hesitation. Mark makes no mention of this memorable

incident. John, who, by the assistance of his mystic and Platonic theology, could embellish the story, or rather confound it, has not said one word on the subject. We are, therefore, constrained to satisfy ourselves with the materials Luke has transmitted to us.

According to this evangelist, Elizabeth, kinswoman of Mary, and wife of a priest named Zachariah, was in the sixth month of her pregnancy *"when the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city called Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, 'Hail thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women'. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, 'Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found favor with God. And behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus'. Then said Mary to the angel, 'How shall this be, for I know not a man?' And the angel answered and said unto her, 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore, also that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God'. And Mary said, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word'. Thereafter (adds the text) the angel departed from her."*

Now what is there in all this that is any way marvellous? Nothing indeed is more simple than this narrative. If the least reflection is employed on it, the wonderful will vanish; and we shall find the greatest care has been taken to spare the modesty of the young persons who might read the

story. An angel entered the house of Mary, *whose husband was absent*. He salutes her, that is, pays her a compliment, which may be translated as follows: – “*Good day, my dear Mary! you are indeed adorable – What attractions! what graces! of all women you are the most lovely in my eyes. Your charms are pledges to you of my sincerity. Crown then my passion. Fear not the consequences of your complai-sance; your husband is a simpleton; by visions and dreams we can make him believe whatever we desire. The good man will regard your pregnancy as the effect of a miracle of the Most High; he will adopt your child with joy, and all will go on in the best manner possible.*” Mary, charmed with these words, and little accustomed to receive the like compliments from her husband, replied, “*Well! – I yield – I rely on your word and address; do with me as you please.*”

Nothing is more easy than to separate the relation of Luke from the marvellous. The event of Mary's pregnancy follows in the order of nature; and if we substitute a *young man* in the place of the *angel*, the passage of the evangelist will have nothing incredible in it. In fact, many have thought that the angel Gabriel was no other than a gallant who, profiting by the absence of Joseph, found the secret to declare and gratify his passion.

We shall not stop to form conjectures on the true name and station of Mary's lover. The Jews, whose testimony on this subject may appear suspicious, assert that this favorite lover was a soldier; the military have always claims on the hearts of the ladies. They add that, from his commerce with the wife of Joseph, the messiah of the Christians sprung, that the discontented husband left his faithless wife in order

to retire to Babylon, and that Jesus with his mother went to Egypt, where he learned the trade of a conjurer, and afterwards returned to practise it in Judea.

The *proto-gospel*, ascribed to James, relates some curious and ridiculous circumstances, altogether omitted in the four canonical evangelists; yet they have nothing revolting to persons who possess faith. This gospel informs us of the ill humor of Joseph on seeing his wife pregnant, and the reproaches he loaded her with on account of her lewdness, unworthy of a virgin reared under the eyes of priests. Mary excuses herself with tears; she protests her innocence, and "*swears in the name of the living God that she is ignorant whence the child has come to her.*" It appears that in her distress she had forgot the adventure of Gabriel:—that angel came the night following to encourage poor Joseph, then on the point of having an affair with the priests, who accused him of having begot this child to the prejudice of Mary's vow of virginity. On this the priests made the two spouses drink of *the waters of jealousy*, that is, of a potion which, by a miracle, did them no injury; the high priest, therefore, declared them innocent. It is related in the same gospel that after Mary had been delivered, *Salome*, refusing to credit the midwife who assured her that the delivered was still a virgin, laid her hand on Mary in order to satisfy herself of the fact. Immediately this rash hand felt itself on fire, but she was cured on taking the little Jesus in her arms.

Whether these histories or rabbinical narratives be true or false, it is certain that the narrative of Luke, if not divested of the marvellous, will always present difficulties to the minds of the incredulous. They will ask how God,

being a pure spirit, could *overshadow* a woman, and excite in her the movements necessary to the production of a child. They will ask how the divine nature could unite with the nature of a woman. They will maintain that the narrative is unworthy of the power and majesty of the Supreme Being, who did not stand in need of employing ridiculous and indecent instruments to operate the salvation of mankind. It will be thought that the Almighty should have employed other means for conveying Jesus into the womb of his mother; he might have made him appear on the earth without being incarnate in the belly of a woman; but there must be wonders in romances, especially if they are religious. It was in all ages supposed that great men were born in an extraordinary manner. Among the Heathen, Minerva sprung out of the brain of Jupiter; Bacchus was preserved in the thigh of the same god. Among the Chinese, the god Fo was generated by a virgin rendered prolific by a ray of the sun. With Christians, Jesus is born of a virgin, impregnated by the operation of the Holy Spirit, and she remains a virgin after that operation! **Incapable of elevating themselves to God, men have made him descend to their own nature. Such is the origin of all incarnations, the belief of which is spread throughout the world.**

Theologians have agitated the question, whether in the conception of Jesus, the Virgin Mary *emiserit semen*? According to Tillemont, the Gnostics, who lived in the time of the apostles, denied that the Word was incarnate in the womb of the woman, and averred that it had taken a body only *in appearance*—a circumstance which must destroy the miracle of the resurrection. Basilides also maintains that

Jesus was not incarnate. Lactantius, in order to establish that the spirit of God could impregnate a virgin, cites the example of the Thracian Mares and other females, rendered prolific by the wind. Nothing is more indecent and ridiculous than the theological questions to which the birth of Jesus has given rise. Some doctors, to preserve Mary's virginity, have maintained that Jesus did not come into the world like other men, *aperta vulva*, but rather *per vulvam clausam*. The celebrated John Scotus regarded that opinion as very dangerous, as it would follow that "*Jesus could not be born of the virgin, but merely had come out of her.*" A monk of Citeaux, called Ptolemy de Luques, affirmed that Jesus was engendered near the virgin's heart, from three drops of her blood. The great St. Thomas Aquinas has examined, whether Jesus could not have been a *hermaphrodite*? and whether he could not have been of the *feminine gender*? Others have agitated the question, "*Whether Jesus could have been incarnate in a cow?*" We may therefore see how one absurdity may engender others in the prolific minds of theologians.

All the wonders which precede the birth of Jesus are terminated by a very natural occurrence. At the end of nine months his mother is delivered like other women; and after so many incredible and supernatural events, the Son of God comes into the world like all others people's children. This conformity in birth will ever occasion the surmise of a conformity in the physical causes which produced the son of Mary. Indeed, the supernatural only can produce the supernatural; from material agents result physical effects; and they maintain in the schools that there must always be a parity of nature between cause and effect.

Though, according to Christians, Jesus was at the same time man and god, some will say it was necessary that the divine germ, brought from heaven to be deposited in the womb of Mary, should contain at the same time divinity and humanity to become Son of God. To use the language of theologians, the *hypostatic union* of the two natures must have taken place before his birth and immixed in the womb of his mother. In that case, we cannot conceive how it could happen that the divine nature should continue torpid during the whole of Mary's pregnancy, in so much that she herself was ignorant of the time of her in-lying. The proof of this we find in Luke, chap. ii. — "*In those days (says he) there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. And as all went to be taxed, every one out of his own city, Joseph also went out of Nazareth and came to Bethlehem to be taxed with Mary, who was great with child. And so it was that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered, and she brought forth her first born son, and wrapt him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*"

This narrative proves that Mary was taken unprovided, and that the Holy Spirit, who had done so many things for her, had neglected to warn her of an event so likely to interest him and so important to all mankind. The humanity of Jesus, being subject to every casualty in our nature, might have perished in this journey undertaken at a time very critical to his mother. Nor do we understand how the mother could remain in complete ignorance of the

proximity of her time, or how the Eternal could so abandon the precious child he had deposited in her womb.

Some other circumstances of the relation of Luke present new difficulties. He speaks of a *taxing* (enumeration) by order of Caesar Augustus—a fact of which no mention is made by any historian, Jewish or profane. We are also astonished to find the son of God born in poverty, having no other asylum than a stable, and no other cradle than a manger, and at the tenderest age, in a rigorous season, exposed to miseries without number.

It is true our theologians have found a way to answer all these difficulties. They maintain that a just God wishing to appease himself destined his innocent son to afflictions, in order to have a motive for pardoning the guilty human race, which had become hateful to him through Adam's transgression, in which, however, his descendants had no share. By an act of justice, whereof the mind of man can form no idea, a God whose essence renders him incapable of committing sin, is loaded with the iniquities of man, and must expiate them in order to disarm the indignation of a father he has not offended! Such are the inconceivable principles which serve for the basis of the Christian theology.

Our doctors add: It was the will of God that the birth of his son should be accompanied with the same accidents as that of other men, to console the latter for the misfortunes attendant on their existence. Man, say they, is guilty before he is born, because all children are bound to pay the debts of their fathers: thus man suffers justly as a sinner himself,

and as charged with the sin of his first father. Granting this, what more consolatory than seeing a God, innocence and holiness itself, suffering in a stable all the evils attached to indigence! That consolation would have been wanting if God had ordained that his son should be born in splendor and with an abundance of the comforts of life. If the innocent Jesus had not suffered, mankind, incapable of extinguishing a debt contracted by Adam, would have been forever excluded from paradise. The painful journey Mary was obliged to undertake in such critical circumstances had been foreseen by Eternal wisdom, which had resolved that Jesus should be born at Bethlehem and not at Nazareth. It was necessary—having been foretold, it behoved to be accomplished.

However solid these answers may appear to the faithful [the Christians], they are not capable of convincing the incredulous, who exclaim against the injustice of making an innocent God suffer, and loading him with the iniquities of the earth. Neither can they conceive by what principle of equity the Supreme Being could make the human race responsible for a fault committed by their first parents, without their knowledge and participation. Finally, they contend that it would have been wiser to have prevented man from committing sin than to permit him to sin, and make his own son die to expiate man's iniquity.

With respect to the journey to Bethlehem, we cannot discover the necessity of it. The place where the saviour of the world was to be born seems a circumstance perfectly indifferent to the salvation of mankind.

As for the prophecy announcing the glory of Bethlehem, in having given existence to the "Leader of Israel" —it does not appear to agree with Jesus, who was born in a stable, and who was rejected by the people whose leader he was to be. It is only a pious straining that can make this prediction apply to Jesus. We are assured that it had been foretold Jesus was to be born in poverty; while, on the other hand the messiah of the Jews is generally announced by the prophets as a prince, a hero, and a conqueror.—It is necessary to know then which of these prophecies we ought to adopt. Our doctors tell us "the predictions announcing that Jesus would be born and live in indigence and meanness ought to be taken *literally*, and those which announce his power and glory ought to be taken *allegorically*." But this solution will not satisfy the incredulous; they will affirm that by this manner of explanation, we may always find in the sacred writings whatever we need. They will conclude that **the scripture [Bible] is to Christians what the clouds are to the man who imagines he perceives in them whatever figures he pleases.**

CHAPTER III

ADORATION OF THE MAGI AND SHEPHERDS—MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS—AND OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES, WHICH FOLLOWED THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Of the four historians of Jesus adopted by the church, two are wholly silent on the facts we are to relate in this chapter; Matthew and Luke, who have recorded them, are not at all unanimous in particulars. So discordant are their

relations that the ablest commentators do not know how to reconcile them. These differences, it is true, are less perceptible when the evangelists are read one after the other, or without reflection, but they become particularly striking when we take the trouble of comparing them. This is, undoubtedly, the reason why we have hitherto had no concordance of the gospels which received the general approbation of the church. Even those which have been printed have not been universally adopted, though it must be acknowledged that they contain nothing contrary to faith. It is, perhaps, from judicious policy that the heads of the church have not approved of any system on this point. They have, probably, felt the impossibility of reconciling narratives so discordant as those of the four Evangelists; for the Holy Spirit, doubtless with a view to exercise the faith of the saints, has inspired them very differently. Besides, an able concordance of the gospels would prove a dangerous work: it would bring together facts related by authors, who, far from supporting, would reciprocally weaken each other—a circumstance which could not fail to stagger at least the faith of the compiler.

Matthew, who, according to common opinion (though a very erroneous one), wrote the first history of Jesus, asserts that as soon as he was born, and still in the stable at Bethlehem, Magi came from the East to Jerusalem, and inquired where the king of the Jews was, whose star they had observed in their own country. Herod, who then reigned in Judea, being informed of the motive of their journey, consulted the people of the law; and having learned that the Christ was to be born at Bethlehem, he

permitted the Magi to go there, recommending to them to inform themselves of this child, so that he himself might do him homage. (Matt. ii. 1)

It appears, from the narrative of Matthew, that as soon as the Magi left Herod, they took the road to Bethlehem --a place not far from Jerusalem. It is surprising that this prince, alarmed at the arrival of the Magi, who had thus announced the birth of a king of the Jews, did not use more precaution to allay his own uneasiness, and that of the capital, which the gospel represents as in a state of consternation at this grand event. It would have been very easy for him to have satisfied himself of the fact without being under the necessity of relying on strangers, who did not execute his commission. The Magi did not return; Joseph had time to save himself and his little family by flight; and Herod remained tranquil in spite of his suspicions and fears. It was not till after a considerable interval that he got into a passion on finding himself deceived; and then, to preserve his crown in safety, he ordered a general massacre of the children of Bethlehem and the neighboring villages! But why suppose such conduct in this sovereign? He had assembled the doctors of the law and principal men of the nation; their advice had confirmed the rumor spread by the wise men; they said it was at Bethlehem that Christ was to be born, and yet Herod did nothing for his own tranquility! Either Herod had faith in the prophecies of the Jews or he had not. In the first case, instead of relying on strangers, he ought himself to have gone with all his court to Bethlehem, and paid homage to the Saviour of the nation. In the second case, it is absurd to make Herod order a general massacre of

infants, on account of a suspicion founded on a prophecy which he did not believe.

This prince's indignation is said not to have been roused till after the lapse of several days, and after he perceived that the Magi derided him and took another road. Why did he not learn by the same means the flight of Jesus, of Joseph, and of his mother? Their retreat must certainly have been observed in a place so small as Bethlehem. It will perhaps be said that God on this occasion permitted Herod to be blinded; but God should not have permitted the inhabitants of Bethlehem and its environs to be so obstinate in preserving a secret that was to cost the lives of all their children. Possessed of the power of working miracles, could God not have saved his son by more gentle means than the useless massacre of a great number of innocents?

On the other hand, Herod was not absolute master in Judea. The Romans would not have permitted him to exercise such cruelties; and the Jewish nation, persuaded of the birth of the Christ, would not have been accessory to them. A king of England, more absolute than a petty sovereign of Judea dependent on the Romans, would not be obeyed, were he to order his guards to go and cut the throats of all the children in a neighboring village, because three strangers, in passing through London, had said to him that among the infants born in that village there was one who, according to the rules of astrology, was destined to be one day king of Great Britain. At the time when astrology was in vogue, they would have contented themselves with causing search to be made for the suspected infant; they would have kept it in solitary confinement, or perhaps put

it to death; but without comprehending other innocent children in its proscription.

We might oppose to the relation of Matthew the silence of the other evangelists, and especially that of the historian Josephus, who, having reasons to hate Herod, would not have failed to relate a fact so likely to render him odious as the massacre of the innocents. Philo is likewise silent on the subject; and no reason can be assigned why these two celebrated historians should have agreed in concealing a circumstance so horrible. We cannot suppose it has proceeded from hatred to the Christian religion; for that detached fact would prove neither for or against it. We are, therefore, warranted to conclude that this massacre is a fable; and that Matthew seems to have invented it merely to have the opportunity of applying as ancient prophecy, which was his predominant taste. But in this instance he has deceived himself. The prophecy which he applied to the massacre of the innocents, is taken from Jeremiah, (xxxi. v 15-16) All the Jews understood it as relating to the Babylonish captivity. It is as follows: "*Thus saith the Lord; a voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping: Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted because they were not.*" The following verse is so plain, that it is inconceivable why Matthew ventured to apply it to the pretended massacre at Bethlehem: "*Thus saith the Lord, refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord, and thy children shall come again from the land of the enemy.*" Their return from the captivity is here clearly pointed out, when the Israelites

should again plant vines after obtaining possession of their own country.

It is also to accomplish a prophecy, that Matthew makes Jesus travel into Egypt. This journey, or rather Jesus' return, had, according to him, been predicted by Hosea in in these words: "*Out of Egypt have I called my son.*" But it is evident, that this passage is to be considered only as relating to the deliverance of the Israelites from bondage, through the ministry of Moses. Besides, the journey and abode of Jesus in Egypt, do not agree with some circumstances which happened in his infancy, as related by Luke, who informs us, that at the end of eight days Jesus was circumcised. The time of Mary's purification being accomplished according to the law of Moses, Joseph and his mother carried Jesus to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord agreeably to the law, which ordained the consecrating the first born (first fruits), and offering a sacrifice for them. On this occasion, Luke tells us that Simeon took the infant in his arms, and declared in the presence of those assisting at the ceremony, that the child was the Saviour of Israel. An old prophetess, called Anna, bore the same testimony, and spoke of him to all who looked for the redemption of the Jews. But why were speeches, thus publicly made in the temple of Jerusalem, in which city Herod resided, unknown to a prince so suspicious? They were much better calculated to excite his uneasiness, and awaken his jealousy than the arrival of astrologers from the East.

Did Joseph and Mary, who came to Jerusalem for the presentation of Jesus, and purification of his mother, return to Bethlehem? and went they thence into Egypt in place of

going to Nazareth? Luke says, that when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. But in what time did the parents of Jesus accomplish all that the law ordained? Was it before going into Egypt, or after their return from that country, where, according to Matthew, they had taken refuge to shelter themselves from the cruelty of Herod? Did the purification of the virgin, and the presentation of her son in the temple, take place before or after the death of that wicked prince? According to Leviticus, the purification of a mother who had brought a son into the world, was to be made at the end of thirty days. Hence we see how very difficult it is to reconcile the flight into Egypt, and the massacre of the innocents, which Matthew relates, with the narrative of Luke, who says that, "after having performed the ordinances of the law, Joseph and Mary returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth;" and then adds, "they went to Jerusalem every year to celebrate the *passover*." If we could adopt the relation of the two evangelists, at what time are we to place the coming of the Magi from the East in order to adore Jesus; the anger of Herod; the flight into Egypt; and the massacre of the innocents? Either the relation of Luke is defective, or Matthew wished to deceive his readers with improbable tales. In whatever way we consider the matter, the Holy Spirit, who inspired these apostles, will be found to have committed a mistake.

There is another fact on which our two evangelists do not better agree. Matthew, as we have seen, makes the Magi come, guided by a star, to Bethlehem, from the extremity of

the East, to adore the child Jesus, and offer him presents. Luke, less taken with the marvellous, makes this child adored by simple shepherds, who watched their flocks during night, and to whom an angel announced the great event of the birth of the Saviour of Israel. The latter evangelist speaks neither of the appearance of the star, of the coming of the Magi, nor of the cruelty of Herod—circumstances, however, which ought to have been recorded by Luke, who informs us that he was so exactly informed of every thing concerning Jesus.

The parents of Jesus, either after their return from Egypt or after his presentation in the temple, went to reside at Nazareth. Matthew, as usual, perceives in this the accomplishment of the prediction: '*he shall be called a Nazarene*'; but unfortunately for his purpose, this prophecy is not to be found in the Bible, nor can it be imagined by whom it was uttered. It is however certain that *Nazarene* among the Jews signified a *vagabond*, a person excluded from the rest of the world, that Nazareth was a pitiful town inhabited by beings so wretched that their poverty had become proverbial, and that beggars, vagrants, and people whom nobody would own were called *Nazarenes*.

The first Christians were so styled. We find them also called *Ebionites*, derived from a Hebrew word which signifies a *mendicant*, a *wretch*, and a *pauper*. St. Francis and St. Dominic, who, in the 13th century, proposed to revive primitive Christianity, founded orders of mendicant monks, destined to live solely on alms, to be true *Nazarenes*, and to levy contributions on the community which these vagabonds have never ceased to oppress. Salmeron, in order to

encourage these mendicant monks, has maintained that Jesus himself was a beggar. The name *Nazarene* was given to the apostles and Jews, who were first converted. The other Jews regarded them as heretics and excommunicated persons, and, according to Jerome, anathematised them in all their synagogues under the name of *Nazarenes*. The Jews even at present give the name of *Nazarenes* (*Nozerim*) to the Christians whom the Arabs and Persians call *Nazari*. The first converts of Jesus and his apostles were only some reformed Jews: they preserved circumcision and other usages appointed by the law of Moses. In this they followed the example of Jesus, who being circumcised, and a Jew during his whole life, had often taught that it was necessary to respect and observe the law. It is, therefore, surprising to see them afterwards treated as heretics. But we shall (in Ch. 17) see the true cause of this change. It was owing to Paul, whose party prevailed over Peter's, the other apostles, and the Nazarenes or Judaising Christians. Paul corrected and reformed the system of Jesus, who had preached only a Judaism reformed. The apostle of the Gentiles [Paul] succeeded in making his master and his old comrades be rewarded as heretics or bad Christians. Thus, it is that theologians take the liberty of rectifying the religion of the Saviour they adore!

We have seen, in the course of this chapter, how little harmony exists between the two evangelists respecting the circumstances attending the birth of Jesus. Let us now examine what could have been the views of these two writers in relating these facts so differently. It is impossible that Jesus, as Luke relates, could constantly reside at

Nazareth till he was twelve years of age if it be true that he was carried soon after his birth into Egypt, where Matthew makes him remain until the death of Herod. Even in the time that Jesus lived, he was upbraided with his stay in Egypt. His enemies asserted that he there learned magic, to which they attributed the wonders, or cunning tricks, they saw him perform. Luke is silent as to the journey to Egypt, which made his hero suspected. He fixes him, therefore, at Nazareth, and makes him go every year with his parents to Jerusalem. But the precaution of that evangelist seems to have been useless. Matthew, who wrote before him, had established the journey and abode of Jesus in Egypt. Origen, in his dispute with Celsus, does not deny it. Hence we see that the Christian doctors did not doubt that Jesus had been in that country [Egypt], notwithstanding the silence of Luke. Let us endeavor then to develop the motives of these two writers.

The Jews were agreed in the expectation of a *messiah*; but as the different orders of the state had their prophets, they also possessed different signs by which they were to know the deliverer. The great, the rich, and well informed persons, did not surely expect that the deliverer of Israel would be born in a stable, and spring from the dregs of the people. They, undoubtedly, anticipated their deliverance by a prince, a warrior, a man of power, able to make himself respected by the nations inimical to Judea, and to break in pieces their chains. The poor, on the contrary, who, as well as the great and the rich, have their portion of self-love, thought they might flatter themselves that the *messiah* would be born in their class. Their nation and their

neighbors presented many examples of great men sprung from the bosom of poverty; and the oracles with which this nation was fed were of such a nature that every family believed itself entitled to aspire to the honor of giving birth to a messiah; though the most general opinion was that he was to come of the race of David. Shepherds and people of the lowest order might readily believe that a woman, delivered in a stable at Bethlehem, had brought Jesus into the world. It may likewise be presumed that Mary, with a view to render herself interesting, said to those who visited her that she was descended from the blood of kings -- a pretension well adapted to excite the commiseration and wonderment of the people. This secret, and the confused remembrance of some prophecies about Bethlehem, the native country of David, were sufficient to operate on the imaginations of these silly people, little scrupulous about proofs of what was told them.

Matthew, who reckoned on the credulity of his readers, had his head full of prophecies and popular notions. To fill up a blank of thirty years in his history of Jesus, he contrived to make him travel into Egypt, without foreseeing the objections that might be made on account of the neglect of the holy family to fulfil the ordinances of the law, such as the circumcision of the child, his presentation in the temple, the purification of his mother, and the celebration of the passover --ceremonies which only could be performed at Jerusalem. Perhaps it is to justify the journey to Egypt and those negligences that Matthew introduces the prophecy of Hosea relative to the return from that place. It seems also to countenance the duration of Jesus's abode there that he

relates the wrath of Herod, and the fable of the massacre of the innocents, which he makes that prince order, though his crimes had, in other respects, rendered him sufficiently odious to the Jews as well as to strangers. Mankind in general are disposed to believe everything of a man who has become famous by his wickedness.

Luke, to elude the reproaches which might be thrown on Jesus on account of his residence and journey in Egypt, has not mentioned it at all, but his silence does not destroy its reality. It was necessary to free Jesus from the suspicion of magic, but he has not cleared him of accusations brought against his birth which are quite as weighty.

Celsus, a celebrated physician, who lived in the second century of Christianity, and who had carefully collected all which had been published against Jesus, asserts that he was the fruit of an illicit intercourse. Origen, in his works against Celsus, has preserved this accusation, but he has not transmitted the proofs on which it was founded. The incredulous, however, have endeavoured to supply them, and found the opinion of Celsus on what follows:

First. From the testimony of Matthew himself, it is most certain that Joseph was very much dissatisfied with the pregnancy of his wife, in which he had no part. He formed the design of quitting her secretly -- a resolution from which he was diverted by an angel, or dream, or perhaps reflection, which always passes among Jews for the effect of an inspiration from on high. It appears, however, that this design of Joseph had transpired, and was afterwards turned into a matter of reproach against Jesus. But Luke, more

prudent than Matthew, has not ventured to mention either the ill-humor of Joseph, or the good-natured conduct he followed. Neither do we find, though he formed this resolution as to Mary, that this easy man [Joseph] again appeared on the stage from the time Jesus entered on it. We are nowhere informed of his death, and it is obvious that he never afterwards beheld his putative son with an eye of kindness. When, at thirty years of age, Jesus and his mother went to the wedding at Cana, there is no mention of Joseph. If we admit with Luke the history of Jesus' dispute with the doctors in the temple of Jerusalem, we shall find a new proof of the indifference which subsisted between the pretended father and supposed son: they met at the end of three days, and deigned not to interchange a word. Epiphanius (lib. i. 10.) assures us that Joseph was very old at the time of his marriage with the virgin, and adds that he was a widower and father of six children by his first wife. According to the *proto-gospel*, the good man had much difficulty in prevailing on himself to espouse Mary, whose age intimidated him; but the high-priest, finding that Joseph was the man most conformable to his own views, succeeded in removing his scruples.

Secondly. If to these presumptions are joined testimonies more positive, and a high antiquity, which confirm the suspicions entertained concerning the birth of Jesus, we shall obtain proofs that must convince every unprejudiced person. The Emperor Julian as well as Celsus, who both had carefully examined all the writings existing in their time for and against the Christian religion and its author, represent the mother of Jesus in a very unfavorable light.

In the works of the Jews, he is treated as an *illegitimate* child; and, almost in our days, Helvidius, a learned Protestant critic, as well as several others have maintained, not only that Jesus was the fruit of a criminal intercourse, but also that Mary, repudiated by Joseph, had other children by different husbands. Besides, this supposed virgin did not want a reason for forsaking Joseph, and flying into Egypt with her son. A prevailing tradition among the Jews states that she made this journey to shelter herself from the pursuits of her spouse, who, in spite of the nocturnal visions which had been employed to pacify him, might have delivered her up to the rigor of the laws. We know that the Hebrews did not understand jesting on this subject.

We also find in the *Talmud* the name of Panther, surnamed *Bar-Panther*, whom they reckon in the number of the husbands of the Virgin. From this it would appear that Mary, repudiated by Joseph, or after her flight, espoused Panther, an Egyptian soldier, her favorite lover, and the real father of Jesus. John Damascene thought to repair the injury which this anecdote might do to Mary's reputation, by saying that the name of *Bar-Panther* was hereditary in the family of Mary, and consequently in that of Joseph. But, Firstly, either Mary was not the kinswoman of Joseph, or she was not the cousin of Elizabeth, who was married to a priest, and therefore of the tribe of Levi. Secondly, we nowhere find in the Bible the name of *Panther* among the descendants of David. If this had been a hereditary surname in that family, it would be found somewhere, unless we suppose that John Damascene learned it by a particular

revelation. Thirdly, the name of *Panther* is by no means Hebrew.

It will perhaps be said that these rumours, so injurious to Jesus and his mother, are calumnies invented by the enemies of the Christian religion. But why decide if the pleas of both parties are not investigated? The imputations are very ancient; they have been advanced against Christianity ever since its origin, and they have never been satisfactorily refuted. In the time of Jesus, we find that his contemporaries regarded his wonders as the effects of magic, the delusions of the devil, the consequences of the power of Belzebub. The relations of Jesus were also of that opinion, and regarded him as an *imposter*—a circumstance stated in the gospel itself, where we shall afterwards find that they wanted to arrest him. On the other hand, Jesus never speaks of his infancy, nor of the time that had preceded his preaching; he did not wish to recur to circumstances dishonorable to his mother, towards whom, indeed, we shall very soon find him failing in filial respect.

The evangelists, in like manner, pass very slightly over the first years of their hero's life. Matthew makes him return from Egypt on the death of Herod, without mentioning in what year that happened. He thus leaves his commentators in doubt whether Jesus was then two or ten years old. We find that the term of ten years is, through complaisance, invented on account of the dispute between him and the doctors of Jerusalem, which Luke places in his twelfth year. This excepted, Jesus disappeared from the scene not to show himself again till thirty years of age.

It is difficult to discover what he did until that age. If we credit Luke, he remained at Nazareth. Yet it is clear that he was somewhere else, for the purpose of learning the part which he was afterwards to play. It has been supposed, not without reason, that Jesus passed a considerable part of his life among the contemplative *Essenians* or *Therapeutes*, who were a kind of enthusiastic Jewish monks, living in the vicinity of Alexandria in Egypt, where it appears he drew up his severe and monastic doctrine. If he had always resided at Nazareth, the inhabitants of that small town would have known him perfectly. Very far from this; they were surprised at seeing him when thirty years of age. They only conjectured that they knew him, and asked each other, "*Is not this the son of Joseph?*" — a question very ridiculous in the mouths of persons who must have been in the constant habit of seeing Jesus in the narrow compass of their town. This does not prevent Justin from telling us that he became a carpenter in the workshop of his pretended father, and that he wrought at buildings or instruments of husbandry. But such a profession could not long agree with a man in whom we find an ambitious and restless mind. The *Gospel of the Infancy* informs us that Jesus, when young, amused himself with forming small birds of clay, which he afterwards animated, and then they flew into the air. The same book says that he knew more than his schoolmaster, whom he killed for having struck him, because Jesus refused to read the letters of the alphabet. We find also that Jesus assisted Joseph in his labors, and by a miracle lengthened the pieces of wood, when cut too short or too narrow. All these extravagancies are not more difficult to

believe than many other wonders related in the acknowledged gospels.

We shall here quit Luke in order to follow Matthew, who places the baptism of John after the return from Egypt, and makes Jesus forthwith commence his mission. It is at this epoch, perhaps, that we ought to begin the life of Jesus. Yet, to let nothing be lost to the reader of the evangelical memoirs, we thought it our duty not to pass over in silence the circumstances which have been noticed, as these preliminaries are calculated to throw much light on the person and actions of Jesus. Besides, the interval between his birth and preaching has not been the part of his history least exposed to the darts of criticism. Matthew, as we have seen, to account for his master's absence during the thirty years, makes him go into Egypt, and return in an unlimited time. Luke, who digested his memoirs after Matthew, perceiving that the abode in Egypt cast a suspicion of magic on the miracles of Jesus, makes him remain in Galilee, going and coming every year to Jerusalem; and making him appear, at the age of twelve, in the capital, in the midst of the doctors, and debating with them. But Mark and John, profiting by the criticism which these different arrangements had experienced, make the messiah drop, as it were, from the clouds, and put him instantly to labor at the great work of man's salvation.

It is thus that, on combining and comparing the several relations, we are enabled to discover the true system of the Gospels, in which, without adopting any alterations, we shall find materials for composing the life of Jesus by merely reducing the marvellous to its proper value.

CHAPTER IV

BAPTISM OF JESUS – HIS ABODE IN THE DESERT – COMMENCEMENT OF HIS PREACHING AND MIRACLES – MARRIAGE AT CANA

From the time the Romans subdued Judea, the superstitious inhabitants of that country, impatient to see the arrival of the messiah so often promised to their fathers, seemed inclined to quicken the slowness of the Eternal by the ardor of their desires. This disposition of mind gave birth to impostures, revolts, and disturbances, the authors of which the Roman power punished in such a manner as to discourage their adherents, or quickly to disperse them. Down to the era we are about to speak of, (which the gospel of Luke fixes at the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius,) none of those who had attempted to pass for the messiah had been able to succeed. To have acted that part well required forces more considerable than those which all Judea could oppose to the conquerors of the world. It was, therefore, necessary to have recourse to craft, and to employ delusions and tricks instead of force. For this purpose, it was of importance to be fully acquainted with the disposition of the Jewish nation; to affect a great respect for its laws and usages, for which it entertained the most profound veneration; to profit ingeniously by the predictions with which they were imbued; to move the passions, and warm the imaginations of that fanatical and credulous people. But all this behoved to be silently effected; it was necessary for him who attempted it, to avoid rendering himself suspected by the Romans; it was

necessary to be on his guard against the priests, doctors, and persons of education, capable of penetrating and thwarting his designs. It was essential to commence with gaining adherents and co-operators, and thereafter a party among the people to support him against the grandees of the nation. Policy required that he should show himself rarely in the capital, to preach in the country, and render odious to the populace, priests who devoured the nation, nobles who oppressed it, and rich people of whom it ought to be naturally jealous. Not to alarm too much, prudence demanded that he should speak in ambiguous language and in parables. Neither could he dispense with working miracles, which, much more than all the harangues in the world, were calculated to seduce ignorant devotees disposed to see the finger of God in every act, the true cause of which they were unable to comprehend.

Such was the conduct of the personage whose life we examine. Whether we suppose that he had been in Egypt for the purpose of acquiring the talents necessary to his views, or that he had always resided at Nazareth, Jesus was not ignorant of the dispositions of his countrymen. As he knew how much predictions were requisite to work on the minds of the Jews, he made choice of a prophet and forerunner in the person of his cousin John Baptist. The latter, evidently in concert with Jesus, preached repentance, baptized on the banks of Jordan, and announced the coming of a personage greater than himself. He said to those who gave ear to him, *"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to loose; he shall baptize you with the Holy*

Ghost and with fire." Jesus accordingly repaired to John on purpose to arrange matters with him, and to receive baptism from his hands. According to the report of Matthew, John at first evinced some difficulty, affirming that, so far from being worthy to baptize Jesus, it was from him that he himself ought to receive baptism. At last, however, he yielded to the orders of Jesus, and administered to him the sacrament of which the innocent son of God could not stand in need.

In this interview, the two kinsmen evidently settled their plans, and took the necessary measures for insuring success. They both had ambition, and shared the mission between them. John yielded the first character to Jesus, whom he judged better qualified to play it with success, and contented himself with being his precursor, preaching in the desert, beating up for followers, and preparing the ways for him—all in consequence of a prophecy of Isaiah, who had said, "*Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God*"—an obscure and vague prediction in which, however, Christians believe they see clearly designated the messiah and his holy precursor.

The arrangements having been once settled by our two missionaries, John took care to tell those who came to hear him that, to pacify Heaven, it was time to repent, that the arrival of the messiah was not far off, and that he had seen him. The sermons of John having made considerable noise, the priests of Jerusalem, vigilant as to what might interest religion and wishing to be informed of his views, dispatched emissaries after him. These men asked him if he was the Christ, or Elias, or a prophet. John answered that he

was neither of these. But when he was questioned by what authority he baptized and preached, he declared that he was the forerunner of the messiah. This proceeding of the priests only tended to give greater weight to John's assertions, and naturally excited the curiosity of the people assembled to hear him. The next day they went in a crowd to the place where the preacher baptized, when, profiting skilfully by the circumstance and perceiving Jesus approaching, he exclaimed, "*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, after me cometh a man who is preferred before me.*"

The author of the gospel ascribed to John, perceiving that it was important to remove the suspicion of collusion between Jesus and his forerunner, makes the Baptist declare twice that he knew him not before baptizing him, but that it had been revealed to him by the Deity that the person on whom he should see the Holy Spirit descending during his baptism, was the son of God. Whence we see that, according to this evangelist, John did not know Jesus, who was, however, his kinsman, according to Luke.

John was much esteemed by the people, whom an austere and extraordinary life is always certain of seducing. They did not suspect that a missionary so detached from the things of this world could ever deceive them. They believed on his word that the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, had descended on Jesus, and that he was the Christ or messiah promised by the prophets. On another occasion, we shall also find John affecting not to know his cousin Jesus: he deputed some of his disciples to learn *who he was*. Jesus replied that they had only to relate to John the miracles he

performed, and by that sign their master would recognize him. We shall afterwards speak of this embassy.

Jesus had associated with him a confident, then called Simon, and afterwards Cephas or Peter, who had been the disciple of John. Scarcely had Simon taken his arrangements with the messiah when he drew over his brother Andrew to the new sect. These two brothers were fishermen. We readily presume that Jesus would not choose his followers among the grandees of the country.

The progress of John Baptist and the attachment of the people to him alarmed the priests; they complained loudly, and John was arrested by order of the tetrarch Herod, who, according to Matthew, caused him to be beheaded to please Herodias his sister-in-law. Yet we do not find the historians of this prince reproaching him with the punishment of the forerunner. After John's death, his disciples attached themselves to Jesus, whose coming John had announced, and who, in his turn, had rendered in behalf of John the most public testimonies in presence of the people: for Jesus had openly declared that John was "*greater than a prophet, and greater than an angel, and that he was not born of woman who was greater than him.*" Nevertheless, the messiah, dreading to be involved in the affair of his forerunner, left his two disciples at Jerusalem, and withdrew into the desert, where he continued forty days. It has been remarked that, during the imprisonment of John, Jesus did not think of delivering him; he performed no miracle in his behalf; after his death he spoke but little of him, and forebore pronouncing his eulogy. He was no longer in need of him, and, perhaps, he wished by this conduct to teach those who

serve the views of the ambitious in a subordinate capacity, that they ought not to reckon too much on gratitude.

It would have been a bad exordium to assign fear as the motive of the messiah's retreat. We are told that he was *carried up by the Spirit*, which transported him to the desert. It was necessary that Jesus should surpass his forerunner. The latter had led a very austere life, his only nourishment being locust and wild honey; but the gospel affirms that Jesus ate *nothing at all* during his retreat, and that on the last day, he having *felt himself hungry*, angels came and ministered to him. The fasting of Jesus for forty days is considered by his followers as a proof of his divinity. But this abstinence falls far short of that practised by a Talapoin at Siam, who, according to La Loubere, "lived satisfactorily without food for *one hundred and seven days!*"

To evince the importance of his mission, the prejudice which it was to occasion to the empire of the devil, and the infinite advantages which were to result from it to his followers, *Jesus, on his return from the desert, pretended that Satan had tempted him, made the most flattering offers to engage him to desist from his enterprise, and proffered him the monarchy of the universe if he would renounce his project of redeeming the human race.* The refusal he gave to these propositions evinced a supernatural desire to labor for the salvation of the world. Such as [those who] heard these details must have been filled with astonishment, penetrated with gratitude, and burning with zeal for the preacher. Of consequence, the number of his adherents increased.

John the Evangelist, or the person who has written under his name, whose object appears to have been to establish the divinity of Jesus, has not mentioned his carrying away, abode in the desert, and temptation. These transactions must have been considered by him prejudicial to the doctrine he wished to introduce. Matthew, Mark, and Luke relate the carrying away and the temptations in a different manner, but calculated to show the power of Satan over the messiah. He transported him, no doubt in spite of himself, to the pinnacle of the temple, and by a miracle, made Jesus contemplate, from the summit of a mountain, all the kingdoms of the universe, without even excepting those whose inhabitants were *antipodes* of Judea. According to the gospels, the devil worked marvels which far surpassed those of Jesus.

The absence of Jesus made him lose for a time, his two disciples Peter and Andrew. The necessity of providing for their subsistence constrained them to resume their former trade. As their master durst not then reside in Jerusalem, he retired towards the banks of the sea of Galilee, where they joined him. "*Follow me, (said he to them,) leave your nets; of catchers of fish I will make you fishers of men.*" He probably made them understand that the arrangements he had made during his retirement furnished him with the means of subsisting, without toil, by the credulity of the vulgar. The two brothers immediately followed him.

Whether Jesus had been expelled from Nazareth by his fellow citizens, or quitted it of his own accord, he fixed his residence at Capernaum, a maritime city, on the confines of the tribes of Zabulon and Naphtali. His mother, a widow, or

separated from her husband, followed him: she could be useful to Jesus and the little troop of adherents who lived with him.

It was at this time that our hero, seconded by his disciples, opened his mission. His sermon, like that of the Baptist, consisted in saying, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. John commenced preaching in the fifteenth year of Tiberius. It was in the same year that his interview with Jesus took place, when he was baptized by John. Towards the end of this year John disappeared: after which Jesus was in the desert, whence he returned to reside with his mother in the city of Capernaum. There he remained a short time only on account of the approach of the festival of the Passover, to celebrate which he repaired to Jerusalem. We may, therefore, fix the commencement of his preaching in the sixteenth year of Tiberius. He celebrated the Passover three times before his death; and the common opinion is that his preaching lasted three years, or until the nineteenth year of Tiberius.

The rumours excited by the baptism and preaching of John, and the testimonies he bore in behalf of Jesus, having died away on the imprisonment and death of the forerunner and flight of the messiah, the latter resumed courage, and thought that, with the assistance of his disciples, he ought to make a new attempt. Too well known at Nazareth, and slighted by his relations, who, on all occasions, seemed to think but little of him, he quitted that ungrateful city to establish himself at Capernaum, in the sixteenth year of Tiberius. It was there that he commenced preaching his new system to some poor fishermen and other low people. He

soon found, however, that his mission was too circumscribed in that place, but to acquire some *éclat* he judged it necessary to perform a miracle, that is, in the language of the Jews, some trick capable of exciting the wonder of the vulgar. An opportunity occurred for this: some inhabitants of Cana, a small village of Galilee Superior, at the distance of about fifteen leagues from Capernaum, invited Jesus and his mother to a wedding. The married persons were poor, though John, who alone relates this story, gives them a steward; yet he tells us that their wine failed at the moment the guests were half intoxicated, or gay. On this Mary, who knew the power or the dexterity of her son, said to him: *They have no wine*. Jesus answered her very roughly, and in a manner which evidently denoted a man warmed with wine: *Woman, what have I to do with thee?* It may, however, be supposed that Jesus had not totally lost the use of his reason, as he still possessed presence of mind to transmute water into wine, so that the miraculous wine was found better than the natural wine they had drunk at the beginning.

This first miracle of Jesus was performed in presence of a great number of persons already half intoxicated; but the text does not inform us whether they were equally astonished the day following when the fumes of the wine were dissipated. Perhaps this miracle was witnessed by the steward only with whom Jesus had secret intelligence. The incredulous, less easily persuaded than the poor inebriated villagers, do not observe in this transmutation of water into wine, a motive for being convinced of the divine power of Jesus. They remark that in the operation, he employed

water in order to make his wine -- a circumstance which may give room to suspect that he made only a composition, of which he, like many others, might have the secret. There was in fact no more power necessary to create wine, and fill the pitchers without putting water into them, than to make an actual transmutation of water into wine. At least, by acting in this manner, he would have removed the suspicion of having made only a mixture.

In whatever manner the miracle was performed, it appears to have made some impression on those who saw it, or who heard it related. It is certain Jesus profited by it to extend his mission even to the capital of Judea; only giving time for his miracle to spread, in order to produce its effect. In expectation of this, he withdrew with his mother, brothers, and disciples, to Capernaum, where he remained till the festival of the Passover (the time of which was near) should collect at Jerusalem a multitude of people, before whom he flattered himself with being able to operate a great number of marvels.

CHAPTER V

JOURNEY OF JESUS TO JERUSALEM – THE SELLERS DRIVEN OUT OF THE TEMPLE – CONFERENCE WITH NICODEMUS

The noise of the miracle at Cana having reached Jerusalem, by means of those who repaired to that city from Galilee, Jesus went there, accompanied by some of his disciples. It was, as has been mentioned, the time of the Passover, and consequently, a moment when almost the

whole nation were assembled in the capital. Such an occasion was favorable for working miracles. John accordingly affirms that Jesus performed a great number, without, however, detailing any of them. Several of the witnesses of Jesus' power believed in him, according to our historian; but he did not place much confidence in them. The reason given for this by John is, "*Because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man.*" In short, he knew everything except the means of giving to those who saw his miracles the dispositions he desired.

But, how reconcile faith in these new converts, in the wonders performed by Jesus, with the bad dispositions they were known to possess? If he knew the state of mind of these witnesses of his miracles, why perform them with certain loss? In this there is a want of just inference in the writer, which must not, however, be imputed to Jesus. It is perhaps better not to refer to John in this matter, than to believe that his sagacious master would perform miracles without design, or for the sole pleasure of working them.

In the same journey to Jerusalem, Jesus performed an exploit which is as great as a miracle, and evinces a powerful arm. According to an ancient usage, merchants had established themselves, especially during the solemn festivals, under the porticos which environed the temple. They furnished victims and offerings to the devout, which they were to present to the Lord in order to accomplish the ordinances of the law; and, for the accommodation of the Jews who repaired thither from different countries, and for their own interest, the priests had permitted the money

changers to fix their stalls in this place. Jesus, who on every occasion showed himself but little favorable to the clergy, was shocked at this usage, which, far from being criminal, tended to facilitate the accomplishment of the Mosaical law. He made a scourge of ropes, and, displaying a vigorous arm on those merchants, drove them into the streets, frightened their cattle, and overturned the counters, without their being able to oppose his enterprise. It may be conjectured that the people had no reason to be displeased with the disturbance, but profited by the money and effects which Jesus overturned in the paroxysm of his zeal. No doubt his disciples did not forget themselves: their master could by this exploit make provision for them, especially if they had been in the secret, and enable them to defray all expenses during their residence in the capital. Besides, they saw in this event the accomplishment of a prophecy of the Psalmist, who foretold that the Messiah would be "eaten up with the zeal of the house of the Lord"—a prophecy that was clearly verified by the uproar which Jesus had occasioned. It would appear that the brokers had not comprehended the mystic sense of this prediction; at least they did not expect to see it verified at their expense. In their first surprise, they neglected to oppose the unexpected attacks of a man who must have appeared to them a maniac; but, on recovering from their astonishment, they complained to the magistrates of the loss they had sustained. The magistrates, afraid, perhaps, of weakening their authority by punishing a man of whom the people had become the accomplice, or a fanatic whose zeal might be approved by the devotees, did not wish to use rigor for this

time; they contented themselves with sending to Jesus to know from himself by what authority he acted – "*What sign (said they) shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?*" On which Jesus answered, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*" But the Jews were not tempted to make the trial; they took him for a fool, and returned, shrugging their shoulders. If they had taken Jesus at his word, they would have experienced great embarrassment; for the gospel informs us that it was not of the temple of Jerusalem he spoke, but of his own body. He meant his resurrection, says John, which was to happen three days after his death. The Jews had not discernment to divine this enigma, and the disciples did not penetrate its true meaning till a long time after, when they pretended their master had risen from the dead. We cannot forbear admiring that Providence, which, wishing to instruct, enlighten, and convert the Jewish people by the mouth of Jesus, employed only figures, allegories, and enigmatical symbols, totally inexplicable by persons the most ingenious and most experienced.

Though Jesus had the power of raising himself from the dead, he did not wish to employ it when in the hands of the Jews, who were ready to arrest and punish him as a disturber of the public repose. He thought it more prudent to decamp without noise, and shelter himself from the pursuit of those whom his brilliant exhibitions might have displeased. He intended to withdraw from Jerusalem during night, when a devout Pharisee, wishing to be instructed, came to see him. He was called Nicodemus, and held the place of senator—a rank which does not always

exempt from credulity. *"Rabbi, (said he to Jesus,) we know that thou art a teacher sent from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."*

This opportunity was favorable for Jesus to declare himself: by a single word he could have decided on his divinity, and acknowledged, before this senator so kindly disposed, that he was God. Yet he evaded a direct answer; contenting himself with saying to Nicodemus, that nobody can share in the kingdom of God unless he be born again. The astonished proselyte exclaimed, that it was impossible for a man already old to be born again, or enter anew into his mother's womb. On which Jesus replied: *"I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."* It appears that Nicodemus was no better satisfied than before. Jesus, to make himself more perspicuous, added, *"that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. Marvel not, that I said unto thee, ye must be born again – The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the spirit."*

Notwithstanding the precision and plainness of these instructions, (resembling the reasoning of our theologians,) Nicodemus, whose understanding was doubtless shut up, did not comprehend any part of them. *"How (asks he) can these things be?"* Here Jesus, pushed to extremity, grew warm: – *"Art thou (says he) a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen, and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things and ye believe not,*

how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the son of man which is in heaven." (John iii 1-13)

We thought it our duty to relate this curious dialogue, as a specimen of the logic of Jesus; the more so as it seems to have served as a model for the fashion of reasoning observed by Christian doctors, who are in the use of explaining obscure things by things still more obscure and unintelligible. They terminate all disputes by referring the decision to their own testimony; that is, to the authority or the church or clergy, entrusted by God himself with regulating what the faithful ought to believe.

The rest of the conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus is equally perspicuous, and in the same style:—The former alone speaks, and appears by the dint of his reasons to have silenced the docile senator, who, it seems, retired fully convinced. Thus it is, that *faith* disposes the elect to yield to the lessons, dogmas, and mysteries of religion even when it is impossible to attach any meaning to the words they hear pronounced.

There is no further mention of Nicodemus—We know not whether he resigned his office of Senator to enroll himself among the disciples of Jesus. Perhaps he was contented with secretly furnishing necessities to his adherents, in gratitude for the luminous instructions he had received. He evidently knew how to profit by them, for John makes him return after the death of Jesus, bringing a hundred pounds of aloes and myrrh, for the purpose of embalming his body, and then interring it, with the assistance of Joseph of Arimathea. This proves that he had

come from his conversation with Jesus a more able theologian than he had begun it. On this occasion, Jesus must have granted him saving grace, without which it would have been impossible to comprehend any of his sublime dogmas.

According to theology, men have occasion for *supernatural grace* to do good. This doctrine is injurious to sound morality. Men always wait for the call from above to do good, and those who direct them, never employ the *calls from below*; that is the natural motives to excite them to virtue. But the clergy cannot give a correct definition of virtue. They say it is an effect of grace that disposes men to do that which is agreeable to the Divinity. But what is grace? How does it act on man? What is it that is agreeable to God? Wherefore doth not God give to all men the grace to do that which is agreeable in his eyes? We are unceasingly told to do good, *because God requires it*; but no one has been able to teach us what that good is which is acceptable to the Almighty, and by the performance of which we shall obtain his approbation.

It must be acknowledged, that the impossibility of comprehending the doctrine of Jesus furnishes a good reason for denying that it can be divine. It cannot be conceived why a God, sent to instruct men, should never distinctly explain himself. No Pagan oracle employed terms more ambiguous, than the divine mission chosen by Providence to enlighten nations. In this the Deity appears to have made it his study to create obstacles to his projects, and to have laid a snare not only for the Jews, but for all those who must read the gospel to obtain salvation; a

conduct equally unworthy of a good and just God, endowed with prescience and wisdom; yet by faith we may succeed in reconciling everything, and readily comprehend why God should speak without wishing to be understood.

As soon as Jesus had quitted Nicodemus, he left Jerusalem, his abode in which had become very dangerous, and wandered through the country of Judea, where he enjoyed greater safety. The uproar he had occasioned in the capital, where so great a multitude was assembled, had not failed to make him known to many; but it was at a distance that he gained the greatest number of partisans. John informs us, in chapter third, that during this period he baptized; thereafter he tells us, in chapter fourth, that he did *not* baptize, but that his disciples baptized for him.

One thing is certain, that, after this, he quitted Judea to go into Galilee. It was, perhaps, to be more private, or to prevent the schism, which, according to the gospel, was ready to take place between the Jews baptized by John, and those whom Jesus and his disciples had baptized. Jesus conceived that prudence required him to remain at a distance, and to leave the field open to a man who was useful to him, and who contented himself with playing the second part under him. It very soon appeared that Jesus made a greater number of proselytes than his cousin; a circumstance which, in the end, might have created a misunderstanding between them. Jesus therefore directed his march towards Samaria, whither we are to follow him, and thence he passed into Galilee.

CHAPTER VI

ADVENTURE OF JESUS WITH THE FEMALE SAMARITAN—HIS JOURNEY AND MIRACLES IN THE COUNTRY OF THE GERASENES

It may be observed that in this examination of the history of Jesus, we follow the most generally received arrangement of facts, without meaning to guarantee that they occurred precisely in that order. Chronological mistakes are not of much importance when they do not influence the nature of events. Besides, the evangelists, without fixing any eras, content themselves with saying *at that time*, which precludes our giving an exact chronology of the following transactions. Precision would require a labor as immense as superfluous, and tend only to show that the history of Jesus, dictated by the Holy Spirit, is more incorrect than that of celebrated Pagans of an antiquity more remote. It would also prove that the inspired writers contradict themselves every instant, by making their hero act at the same time in different places, and often remote from each other. On the other hand, this great labor would not inform us which of the evangelists we ought to prefer, seeing all in the eyes of faith have truth on their side. Time and place do not change the nature of facts; and it is from these facts we must form our ideas of the legislator of the Christians.

Jesus having commenced his journey in the summer season, felt oppressed with thirst near Sichar, in the country of Samaria, which gave rise to a singular adventure. Near this city there was a well, known by the name of Jacob's fountain. Fatigued with his journey, Jesus sat down on the

brink of the well, waiting the return of his disciples, who had gone to the city for provisions. It was about noon, when a female came to draw water. Jesus asked her to let him drink out of the vessel she held; but the Samaritan, who knew from his countenance that he was a Jew, was astonished at his request, as there was no intercourse between the orthodox Jews and the Samaritans. According to the custom of partisans of different sects, they detested each other most cordially. The messiah, who was not so fastidious as the ordinary Jews, undertook the conversion of the female heretic, for whose sex we find in him a strong attachment through the whole course of his history. "*If thou knewest*", said he to her, "the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, give me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." The Samaritan woman, who did not observe Jesus to have any vessel in his hand, asked whence he could draw the living water of which he spoke? On this the messiah, assuming a mysterious tone, answered, "Whoso drinketh of this well shall thirst again, but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; It shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." The female, who was a dame of easy virtue, asked some of that marvellous water; and Jesus, from this discourse having discovered the profession of the woman, ingeniously got off by telling her to go and seek her husband; calculating, perhaps, on being able to steal away when she was gone. But the lady related to him her life; gave some details of her conduct; and thereby enabled him to conjecture enough of it to speak as a conjuror. Accordingly, he told her that she had had five

husbands; that she had none at that time, and that the man with whom she lived was only a gallant. The Samaritan woman took Jesus for a sorcerer or a prophet; he did not deny it; and as he was not then afraid of being stoned or punished, he made bold for the first time to confess that he was the messiah.

They were at this part of their dialogue, when the return of Jesus' disciples put an end to it. The latter, whether they knew the profession of the loquacious dame, or were more intolerant than their master, were surprised at the *tete-a-tete*; yet none of them ventured to criticise the conduct of Jesus; while the Samaritan woman seeing his retinue believed in reality that he was a prophet or the messiah. Leaving her pitcher, she went directly to Sichar, "*Come and see*", said she to the inhabitants, "*a man who told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?*" —The astonished inhabitants went and met Jesus; and charmed with hearing him preach, without comprehending one word of his discourse, they invited him to come and reside with them. He yielded to their request for two days only: the provisions purchased were put up in reserve, and the troop lived during that time at the cost of these heretics, delighted no doubt with defraying the expenses of the Saviour and his followers.

All the marvellous in this adventure turns on Jesus having divined that the Samaritan lady had had five husbands, and lived at that time in criminal intercourse with a favorite. Yet it is easy to perceive that Jesus could learn this anecdote either in his conversation with the prating dame, or by public rumor, or in some other very easy way.

But unbelievers find another reason for criticising this relation of John. Laying aside the marvellous, they attack the *truth* of the transaction. All history attests, that in the time of Jesus, Samaria was peopled by colonies of different nations, which the Assyrians had transported thither after the destruction of the kingdom of Israel. This would seem to exclude the expectation of the messiah, in which, according to John, the Samaritans lived. Pagans and Idolators could not have very distinct notions of an event peculiar to Judea. If the Samaritans were the descendants of Jacob, it was not necessary to put into the mouth of the Samaritan woman these words, "*Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say, Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.*" It was also absurd to make Jesus say, "*ye shall no more worship the Father, either in this mountain or at Jerusalem; ye worship ye know not what*", for the law of Moses does not forbid the worshipping God in whatever place we may find ourselves. In the time of Jesus, the laws or usages of the Jews required, that none should offer sacrifice any where, except in the temple of the capital; but the places of prayer depended on every man's own will and pleasure. It is, besides, absurd to say, that the descendants of Jacob did not know the God whom they adored to be Jehovah, the God of Moses and of the Jews; unless it is pretended, that they did not know whom they worshipped. Since the mission of Jesus, Christians have undoubtedly nothing to reproach them with on this head. Moreover the words of Jesus seem to insinuate, that he wished to abolish the worship of the Father. It is certain that Christians share their homage between him and his Son, which, faith a part, annihilates the

dogma of the unity of God. Finally, Jesus did not conjecture right in saying, that the Father would be no longer worshipped at Jerusalem, or on the mountain; for this Father has not ceased one instant to be worshipped there for these eighteen centuries, by Jews, by Christians, and by Mahometans.

If it is maintained, that the Samaritan woman was a heathen, it is not likely that she would have regarded Jesus as the messiah, whom she neither knew nor expected. Add to this, that the Samaritans believed in Jesus on the word of a courtesan; a credulity of which Jews and Christians only could be susceptible. Jesus and his disciples were Jews, and in that character excluded from Samaria. It is of no import, therefore, by whom the country was inhabited.

Two days having elapsed, and the people of Sichar being, in all appearance, sufficiently instructed, Jesus quitted their city, and with his disciples took the road of Upper Galilee. In this journey, Jesus considering the hostile disposition of his countrymen, thought proper not to enter Nazareth, the place of his nativity. He applied to himself the famous proverb, *a prophet has no honor in his own country*. It was otherwise in the rest of the province:—as soon as the people knew of his arrival, they gave him welcome. Luke assures us that he was esteemed and honored by everybody. These good people had beheld the wonders which he had operated in Jerusalem, during the festival of the Passover. In gratitude for these favorable dispositions, and for the faith he found among the Galileans, Jesus did not content himself with instructing them, but confirmed his mission, and testified his love by a crowd of prodigies. The number was,

doubtless, very great, as Matthew is constrained to say generally, that he healed all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people; and that it was sufficient to obtain a cure, to present to him the sick, whatever might be their disease. Lunatics, whose number was great in that country; idiots, hypochondriacs, and persons possessed with devils, had but to fly to him for relief, and their cure was certain.

This multitude of miracles, for so they style the cures operated by Jesus, drew after him a crowd of idlers and vagabonds from Galilee, Jerusalem, Decapolis, Judea, and the country beyond Jordan. It was in this journey he obtained two famous disciples: they were brothers, sons of a fisherman of the name of Zebedee, and called James and John. The first, though, probably, he could not read, afterwards composed mystical works, which are at this day revered by Christians. With respect to John, he was the favorite of his master, and received from him marks of distinguished attention. He afterwards became a sublime Platonist, and, through gratitude, deified Jesus in the gospels and epistles published in his name.

The reputation and resources of Jesus were so great in Galilee, that, to increase the number of his followers, it was only necessary for him to open his mouth and speak. The two disciples already mentioned, he called with an intention to keep near his person. Wishing, however, to repose after the fatigues of preaching and performing miracles, he resolved to quit the cities and retire to the sea coast. He conjectured, that to make himself desirable, and not exhaust his credit, it was prudent not to suffer himself to be seen too

long or too near. The people, fond of hearing the wonderful sermons of Jesus, followed him. Pressed by the crowd, he happily perceived two vessels; and stepping into the one belonging to Simon Peter, he harangued the eager multitude from it. Thus the boat of a fisherman became a pulpit, whence the Deity uttered his oracles.

The Galileans were not rich, and, accordingly, the troop of Jesus' adherents augmented. We find his four first apostles laboring in their trade of fishermen during the abode of the messiah in the province. The day on which he preached in the vessel had not been fortunate for them; and the night preceding was not more favorable. Jesus, who knew more than one profession, thought that it behoved him to do something for people who showed so much zeal. When, therefore, he had finished his harangue and the crowd had retired, he bade Simon advance into the middle of the water and cast his net; the latter excused himself, saying, that he had already thrown several times without success. But Jesus insisted:—then said Simon, *I will cast it on thy word*: on which, by an astonishing miracle, the net broke on all sides. Simon and Andrew were unable to drag it out, they called their comrades, and drew out of it fishes enough to fill two ships. Our fishermen were so surprised, that Peter took his master for a wizard, and prayed him to depart. But Jesus encouraged him, and promised not to alarm them again, seeing that henceforth he, Peter, should no longer occupy himself with catching fish, but men.

The messiah finding himself near Cana, judged it proper, as he had once performed a miracle there, to enter that place. An officer of Capernaum, whose son was sick of a

fever, repaired to this village on purpose to try the remedies of Jesus, of whose powers so many persons boasted. He entreated the physician to come to his house and cure his son; but our Esculapius, who did not chuse to operate before eyes too clear-sighted, got rid of this importunate person in such a way as not to incur any risk, in case he should not succeed: Go, said he to the officer, *thy son liveth*. The officer, while approaching his own habitation, learned that the fever, which perhaps was intermittent, had left his son. No more was necessary to cry up the miracle, and convert all the family.

After having traversed the sea coast, and made some stay at Cana, Jesus repaired to Capernaum, where, as has been related, he fixed his residence. The family of Simon Peter was established in that city; and it was no doubt this reason, joined with the bad treatment he had received from the inhabitants of Nazareth, that determined Jesus to make choice of this residence. It appears he was abhorred in the city where he had been educated; for as soon as he attempted to preach there, the people wanted to throw him headlong. At Capernaum they listened to and admired him; he harangued in the synagogue, explained the scripture, and showed that he himself was foretold in it. In the midst of his sermon, one Sabbath day, they brought him a person possessed, who perhaps in concert with him, began to cry out with all his might; "*Let us alone: what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the holy one of God.*" The people waited in terror for the issue of this adventure, when Jesus, certain of his ground, addressed himself not to the man, but to the

devil possessing him: "*Hold thy peace*", said he, "*and come out of him.*" Immediately the malign spirit overturned the possessed, threw him into horrible convulsions, and disappeared without any person seeing him.

Physicians, especially those acquainted with the eastern countries, do not admit miracles of the nature of this one. They know that the diseases considered *possessions*, were owing solely to disorders produced in the brain by excessive heat. These maladies were frequent in Judea, where superstition and ignorance impeded the progress of medicine and all useful knowledge. Out of that country we find but few possessed with devils. This incredulity strips Jesus of a great number of his miracles; yet taking away the *possessions*, there still remain enough. Most of the possessed among us are hypochondriacs, maniacs, hysterical women, melancholy persons, and those tormented with the vapors or spasms; or they are impostors, who, to gain money, to interest the simple and to display the power of the priests, consent to receive the devil, that the clergy may have the glory of expelling him. There is scarcely a possession now-a-days which could resist a flogging.

Miracles are food for the imagination, but the body requires more substantial aliments: the adventure which has been related had led to the hour of dinner. On leaving the synagogue, Jesus was invited to the house of Peter, where everything appears to have been prepared for performing a second miracle. The mother-in-law of Simon felt sick at the moment they had need of her in managing the kitchen. Jesus, who possessed the talent of readily curing the relatives of his disciples, took her by the hand, and made

her rise from her bed: she arose completely cured, cooked the victuals, and was in a condition to serve the guests.

In the evening of the same day, they brought Jesus all the sick in Capernaum, and all the possessed, whom, according to Matthew, he cured by some words; but, according to Luke, by laying hands on them. Several devils, on coming out of the possessed, had the impudence to betray the secret of the physician, and openly declare, that he was "Christ the Son of God." This indiscretion displeased Jesus, who wished, or feigned to wish, to keep private. Luke tells us that *"he rebuked them, and suffered them not to speak, for they knew that he was Christ."*

According to theologians, the Son of God, in all his conduct, had in view only to lead the devil astray, and conceal from him the mystery of redemption: Yet we see, that Jesus was never able to deceive his cunning enemy. In the whole gospel system, the devil is more sly and powerful than both God the Father and God the Son: he is always successful in thwarting their designs, and succeeds in reducing God the Father to the dire necessity of making his dear Son die in order to repair the evil which Satan had done to mankind. Christianity is real Manichaeism, wherein every advantage is on the side of the bad principle, who, by the great number of his adherents renders nugatory all the purposes of the Deity. If the devil knew that Jesus was "the Christ," such knowledge must have been posterior to his retirement into the desert, for he then spoke to him in a style which intimated that he knew him not. It is superfluous to examine at what time the devil acquired this knowledge; but it is manifest that he had it only by divine permission.

Now God, by granting to the devil the knowledge of his Son, either wished, or did not wish, that he should speak of it. If he wished it, Jesus did wrong in opposing it: if he did not wish it, how was the devil able to act contrary to the divine will? Jesus carefully concealed his quality, the knowledge of which could alone operate salvation. But, in this case, the devil had the greatest interest to conceal it; yet in opposition to this interest, and the will of the Almighty, the devil made known the quality of Jesus. Besides, if Jesus did not wish that the devil should discover him, why delay imposing silence on him until after he had spoken?

The conduct of the Messiah in these particulars has made it to be believed that not daring to endanger himself by publicly assuming the quality of Christ, or Son of God, he was not displeased with the devils for divulging his secret, and sparing him the trouble of speaking. It was, moreover, eliciting a very important confession out of the mouth of an enemy.

Jesus was not ignorant, that to retain his influence over the minds of men, it was necessary to prevent satiety. Accordingly, on the day following that on which so many miracles had been wrought in Capernaum, he departed before day-break, and withdrew into a desert. All legislators have loved retirement. It is there that they have had divine inspirations, and it is on emerging from these mysterious asylums that they have performed miracles calculated to deceive the vulgar. Solitary reflection is at times necessary to ascertain the state of our affairs.

Meanwhile, the disciples of Jesus, notwithstanding his flight, did not lose sight of him; they repaired to him at the

moment he wished to be alone, and informed him that they had been everywhere in search of him. In fact, there were still many sick and possessed in the country; yet this consideration did not induce Jesus to return to Capernaum, on which account many resorted to him in his retreat. To get rid of them, he again traversed Galilee, where he cured the sick and cast out devils. This is all the gospel mentions. It appears he tarried little on his road, while he preached as he went along; for in a short time he had advanced a considerable way on the shore of the sea of Galilee. As the multitude augmented by idle and curious people from the villages, our preacher, finding himself pressed by the crowd, gave orders to his disciples to convey him to the other side, on the territory of the Gerasenes.

When he had landed, a doctor of the law offered to become his follower: but Jesus readily conceived that a *doctor* would not suit him. He would have cut a poor figure in a company composed of fishermen and clowns, such as those of whom the messiah had formed his court. He gave the doctor to understand that he would repent of this step; that this kind of life would not agree with him; "*the son of man,*" said he to the doctor, "*hath no where to lay his head.*"

Jesus would not permit his disciples to ramble too far in the territory of the Gerasenes; for amongst them were some of that country. One asked permission to go and perform the last duties to his father;—another, to embrace his family, but Jesus harshly refused their requests. The first received for answer, "*let the dead bury their dead.*" The other, "*whoever having put his hand to the plough, and looketh back, is not fit for the kingdom of heaven.*" The incredulous think they perceive

in these answers a proof of the rough habits, and repulsive and despotic spirit of Jesus, who, for the kingdom of heaven, obliged his disciples to neglect the most sacred duties of morality. But Christians, docile to the lessons of their divine master, which they dare not examine, have made perfection consist in a total abandonment of those objects which nature has rendered dearest to man. Christianity seems intended only to create discord, detach men from every thing on earth, and break the ties which ought to unite them. There is, according to Jesus, but one thing needful, namely, to be attached to him exclusively: a maxim very useful in meriting heaven, but calculated to destroy every society on the earth.

After our missionary had spent some time in the country of the Gerasenes, one day towards the evening he passed over to the other side of the lake, having previously dismissed the people, who had come that day on purpose to hear him; but he did not preach. Fatigued, he fell asleep on the passage, whilst a furious tempest overtook the ship. His affrighted disciples, impressed with the idea of their master being more powerful when awake than when asleep, acquainted him with the danger. This drew on them reproaches for their want of faith, which, probably, gave time for the tempest to subside. Then Jesus, in a tone of authority, commanded the sea to be still, and immediately the order was obeyed. In spite of this prodigy, the faith of the disciples was for a long time wavering. Jesus after this returned to the country of the Gerasenes, without having either preached or performed miracles on the other side.

CHAPTER VII

JESUS CURES TWO PERSONS POSSESSED WITH DEVILS – MIRACLE OF THE SWINE – WONDERS PERFORMED BY JESUS TILL THE END OF THE FIRST YEAR OF HIS MISSION

Landed again in the country of the Gerasenes, Jesus took a route by which no person had for some time passed. Two demoniacs, inhabiting the tombs in the neighborhood, rendered this passage dangerous. Scarcely had Jesus shown himself when these madmen ran to meet him. As he was a connoisseur in matters of possession, he no sooner perceived them than he began to exorcise, to make the unclean spirits come out of them. Notwithstanding his divine skill, he acquitted himself very imperfectly on this occasion. It was not with *one* devil, but with a legion of devils he had to deal. One of them, amused at the mistake of the son of God who asked him his name, answered, *I am called Legion*. On this Jesus changed his batteries, and was proceeding to dislodge them, when the devils, obstinate in continuing in the country, or very little desirous of returning to hell, proposed a capitulation. One of the articles stipulated, that on leaving the body of the possessed, they should enter into a herd of swine, which fed close by on the declivity of a hill. Jesus readily agreed, for once, to grant something on the prayer of the devils, and not to use his authority rigorously. Neither he nor his disciples, as good Jews, ate pork: he supposed, therefore, that swine, prohibited by the law, might well serve for a retreat to devils. He consented to the treaty; the demons came out of their former residence to enter into the swine, who, feeling

Satan within them, were thrown into commotion, or, perhaps, were terrified—a very natural thing; and having precipitated themselves into the sea, were drowned to the number of about two thousand. If a legion of devils is composed of the same number as a Roman legion, we must believe that there were six thousand devils. This evidently makes three devils for each hog, a sufficient number to induce them to commit suicide.

Some grave authors assure us, that Jesus never laughed, nor even smiled; yet it is very difficult to believe, that the "son of God" could preserve his gravity after performing such a trick. But it did not appear so humorous to the herdsmen, who found this fine miracle so little pleasant that they complained of it to their employers, and ran to the city; where the affair was no sooner known than the proprietors of the swine, far from being converted, bewailed a prodigy so ruinous to them, and maintained that it was a matter of public concern. The Gerasenes went in a body to oppose the entry of Jesus into their city, and, from inability to punish, besought him to leave their territory as soon as possible. Such was the effect which the miracle of sending devils into the swine produced.

This memorable transaction must be true, for it is attested by three evangelists, who, however, vary in some circumstances. Matthew informs us, that the possessed were *two* in number; Mark and Luke maintain that there was only *one*; but so furious, according to Mark, that they could not bind him *even with fetters*. Luke is certain that the devil frequently carried him into the deserts; Mark affirms that he spent his days and nights in the tombs, and on the

neighboring mountains. On this occasion Jesus was also proclaimed *Christ* by the devil. As he was among his friends, or disciples, he did not enjoin silence to Satan. The acknowledgement was useful when given in private, and could not hurt him; but there were occasions on which it might do harm if made in public. It was necessary, therefore, our puissant miracle-worker should be circumspect, especially when he did not perceive himself sufficiently supported.

Unbelievers discover important errors, and evident marks of falsehood in the narrative, which also appears ridiculous, 1st, They are surprised to see devils, who, according to Christians, are condemned to eternal torments in hell, leaving it to take possession of the inhabitants of this earth. 2dly, They are astonished at seeing the devils address prayers to the son of God. It is an article of Christian faith, that to pray, grace is requisite; that the damned cannot pray; and much more, that this grace must be denied to the chief of the damned. 3dly, The incredulous are offended at a miracle by which Jesus benefitted two persons possessed with devils, at the expense of the proprietors of two thousand swine, to whom this miracle cost at least eighteen thousand dollars;—a transaction not quite agreeable to the rules of equity. 4thly, It cannot be conceived how Jews, whom their law inspired with horror towards swine, could have herds of these animals among them, and which they could not even touch without being defiled; and, 5thly, It is indecorous to make the "*son of God*" enter into a compromise with devils; ridiculous to make them enter into swine; and unjust to make them enter into and destroy other people's property.

We are not informed what became of these devils after being precipitated into the sea. It is not unreasonable to believe, that, in coming out of the swine, they entered into the Jews, to procure the saviour the pleasure of casting them out again; for the curing of people possessed was, of all miracles, that in which he was most expert.

The possessed person cured by Jesus, penetrated with gratitude to his physician, with whom he was perhaps previously acquainted, wanted to follow Jesus, according to Mark; but it was foreseen that his testimony might become suspicious if he put himself in the train of the messiah, who, therefore, chose rather that he should repair to his family, and announce the mercies he had received from the Lord. He was a native of Decapolis, a country, as we have seen, very much disposed to credulity. Accordingly, as soon as the man had there recounted this adventure, every body was transported with admiration. We are, however, astonished at the difference between these folks, so remarkable for a docile faith, and the Gerasenes:—the inhabitants of Decapolis believe all without seeing any thing, whilst the Gerasenes, eye witnesses of the prodigy, are not moved by it, and uncivilly refuse Jesus admittance into their city. We commonly find in the gospel, that to witness a miracle is a very strong reason for not believing it.

The hardness of heart and unbelief of the Gerasenes, and particularly the request they made to the messiah not to come among them, obliged him to re-embark with his disciples and return to Galilee, where he was very kindly received. It is not, however, related whether he preached and performed miracles; even the time he continued there is

not accurately known.—The friends of Jesus, and the relations of his disciples and mother, received, it appears, from time to time, intelligence of his wonders, which they took care to circulate; and, on learning that they wanted him, he returned to Capernaum. Scarcely was his arrival known, when the people, always fond of sermons and miracles, resorted to him in crowds. Neither his house nor the space before the door could contain the multitude; he required the voice of a Stentor to make himself heard at the extremities of the crowd; but the idlers, content with following him without knowing why, were very little troubled about understanding his orations.

The Pharisees, to whom Jesus' success began to give umbrage, resolved to satisfy themselves, if there was any reality in what was reported of him. Some doctors of Gallilee, who were not of the number of our missionary's admirers, repaired to him. They heard him preach, and came from his sermons more possessed against him: even his miracles could not convert them, though, according to Luke, the power of the Lord was displayed in their presence in the cure of the sick. But, as has been remarked, the miracles of the messiah were calculated to convince those only who did not see them. Thus it is, that these miracles are believed at present by people who would not credit those performed in their presence.

Four men who carried a paralytic on his bed, unable to penetrate through the crowd, were advised to ascend with the burden to the roof of the house, and, making an opening there, to let down the sick man in his bed, and lay him at the physician's feet. The idea appeared ingenious and new to

the latter, and indicated first rate faith; accordingly, addressing the sick man, he said, "My son, be of good courage, thy sins are forgiven thee." This absolution or remission, was pronounced so as to be heard by the emissary doctors, who were highly offended at it. Jesus, divining their dispositions, addressed his discourse to them—"Why do you suffer wicked thoughts to enter into your hearts? which is easier to say to this paralytic, thy sins are forgiven thee; or to say to him, Arise, take up thy bed and walk." This question, boldly proposed in the midst of a fanatical people, the sport of prejudice, embarrassed the doctors, who did not think proper to reply. Jesus, profiting by their embarrassment, said to the paralytic, *Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thine house.* This prodigy impressed their minds with terror: it especially made our doctors, the spies, tremble, while the people exclaimed, "Never have we seen before anything so wonderful." But if the doctors were afraid, they were not converted; and notwithstanding the cure of the paralytic, they had no faith in the absolution granted by Jesus. It may, therefore, be supposed, that this miracle was attended with circumstances which rendered it suspicious: perhaps the gospel will enable us to discover them.

When the same fact is differently related by different historians equal in authority, we are constrained to doubt it; or, at least, are entitled to deny that it happened in the manner supposed. This principle of criticism must apply to the narratives of the gospel writers, as well as to those of others. Now, Matthew merely tells us, that a paralytic was presented to Jesus, who cured him, without relating the

wonderful circumstance of the roof being perforated, and the other ornaments with which Mark and Luke embellished their narratives. Thus, either we are in the right in suspending our belief as to this fact, or we may believe that it has not occurred in the manner related by the two last evangelists. Again, Mark and Luke, who say that the sick man was elevated on his bed to the top of the house, having previously informed us the crowd was so great that the bearers of the diseased were unable to force their way, suppose, without expressing it in words, another very great miracle. They make the carriers penetrate through the crowd. Arrived, we know not how, at the foot of the wall, they could not singly, and far less loaded with the sick man, climb up to the roof of the house. Luke says they made an opening through it. In that case the people must have perceived them, particularly, those in the inside of the house. During the silent attention they gave to the discourse of Jesus, they must have heard the noise made by the men in raising up a bed to the roof, and afterwards uncovering, or making a hole in it, through which to convey the sick man. This operation became more difficult if the roof, instead of being covered with tiles, was flat. Now, all the houses of the Jews and orientals were, and still are, constructed in this manner. These difficulties furnish sufficient motives for doubting this grand miracle. But it will become more probable, if we suppose that the sick man was already in the house with Jesus; or that things being previously arranged, they let down by a trap-door made on purpose, a paralytic most certain of being cured on command of the messiah. This transaction might appear

marvellous to a populace disposed to see prodigies every where; but it made less impression on the doctors, who had come purposely to scrutinize the conduct of our adventurer. They conjectured, that it was dangerous to contradict weak fanatics, though they did not credit the miracle they had witnessed.

Some days thereafter Jesus preached along the sea coast, and passing near the custom-house, perceived Matthew, one of the officers, who sat there. His mien pleased the messiah, on whose invitation the subaltern financier quitted his post, and followed him, after having given a great entertainment to Jesus and his party. Matthew introduced his new master to publicans, and toll collectors, his brethren in trade, and others of similar repute. The Pharisees and doctors, who watched our missionary, came to Matthew's house to be assured of the fact. Jesus, occupied with gratifying his appetite, did not at first observe that he was watched. Some words, however, spoken rather loudly, attracted his attention: it was the doctors who reproached the disciples with eating and drinking with persons of doubtful reputation. "How," probably said they to them, "how dares your master, who constantly preaches up virtue, sobriety, and repentance, show himself publicly in such bad company? How can he associate with knaves, monopolizers, and men whom their extortions render odious to the nation? Why does he have in his train women of bad lives, such as Susan and Jane, who accompany him continually?" The disciples, attacked in this manner, knew not how to reply; but Jesus, without being disconcerted, answered with a proverb: — "*It is not the whole*", said he, "*but*

the sick who have need of a physician." After this he cited a passage of scripture, which cannot now be found – "*Learn*", said he, "*the truth of this saying, I love mercy better than sacrifice.*" It appears the doctors did not consider themselves defeated, and Jesus was so transported with zeal as to say, that he "*came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.*" In that case, why did he reject the Pharisees and doctors, whom he called *whitened sepulchres*? If the adversaries of Jesus were not righteous, they were sinners, whom he was come to call to repentance; consequently he ought not to have renounced them.

Whatever reason Jesus might have to palliate or justify his conduct, it was very soon published abroad. John Baptist's disciples who heard it, and whom, perhaps, jealously excited, came in search of him, and asked the reason of the difference in the life he and his disciples led, and that which they themselves followed. We fast, (said they) continually, whilst you and your followers enjoy good cheer. We practise austerities, and live in retirement, whilst you run about and frequently keep company with persons of evil repute. The reproach was embarrassing, but Jesus contrived to evade it. "*The friends of the bridegroom, (replied he,) ought neither to fast, nor live in sorrow whilst they have the bridegroom with them; a time will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them; and then they shall fast. No man putteth a piece of new cloth on an old garment – neither do men put new wine into old bottles: and no person asks for new wine when he can get old, for he finds the old better.*" John's disciples had no reply to reasons so sublime and convincing. The enigmatical symbol, or pompous

bombast, by which Jesus got out of this affair, is closely imitated by our modern preachers, who find it very proper argument to shut the mouths of those who are not inclined to dispute eternally about what they do not understand.

This incident demonstrates, that the Pharisees and doctors were not the only persons who were offended with Jesus, and the company he kept. In the epistles, ascribed to Barnabas, that apostle says expressly, that the "*apostles, whom the Lord chose, were very wicked men, and above all sinners iniquitous.*" The fact is also confirmed in Matthew ix., Mark ii. and Luke v. This evidently decides the cause in favour of the partizans of lax morality, and furnishes them with victorious arms against the modern puritans. We may also remark, that the actions and expressions of Jesus on this occasion, authorise the conduct and language of our holy guides, our lords the bishops, who when reproached with their iniquitous behaviour, shut our mouths by averring, that *we ought to do as they tell us, and not what they do!*

It cannot be denied, that the discrepancy which existed between the conduct of Jesus and the principles of the Jews, or even in his own doctrine, required extraordinary miracles to prove his mission. He was not ignorant of this; prodigies, therefore, were commonly the strongest of his arguments; these were well calculated to gain the vulgar, who never value themselves on reasoning, but are ready to applaud the man who exhibits wonders, and acquires the secret of pleasing their fancy.

After Jesus had silenced John's disciples, the chief of a synagogue waited on him, and besought him to come and

lay hands on his daughter, twelve years old, *who was dead*, according to Matthew, but who was only *very sick*, according to Mark and Luke; a difference which seems to merit some attention. Jesus complied with the invitation; and whilst proceeding to the house overheated himself so much that a virtue went out of him sufficient to cure all who were in its atmosphere. We shall not form conjectures on the nature of this virtue or divine transpiration. We shall only remark, that it was so potent as instantaneously to cure a woman afflicted for twelve years with an issue of blood; a disease which, probably, the spectators had not better verified than its cure. On this occasion, Jesus perceiving that there had gone out of him a considerable portion of virtue, turned towards the afflicted female, whom his disciples had rudely pushed back, and seeing her prostrate at his feet, "Daughter, (said he) be of good cheer, thy faith hath made thee whole." The poor woman, whom the disciples had intimidated, charmed with being relieved from her fright in so easy a manner, confessed openly she was cured.

When our miracle performer was arrived at the house of Jairus, the chief of the synagogue, it was announced to the latter that his daughter had expired, and that the house was full of minstrels, who were performing a dirge or mournful concert according to the custom of the country. Jesus, who on the way had got the father of the girl to prattle, was not disconcerted at the news. He began with making every body retire, and then by virtue of some words raised her from the dead.

In historical matters we must prefer two writers who agree, to a third who contradicts them. Luke and Mark

affirm that the damsel was dead; but here unfortunately it is the hero himself who weakens his victory. On their saying that she was dead, he affirmed that she was only *asleep*. There are girls who at twelve years of age are subject to such swoons. On the other hand, the father of the damsel appears to have acquainted the physician with the condition of his child; and he, more in the secret than others, did not believe the intelligence of her death. He entered alone into her chamber, well assured of her recovery if she was only in a swoon: if he had found her dead, there is every reason to believe, he would have returned, and told the father that he had been called too late, and regreted the accident.

Jesus did not wish that this miracle should be published; he forbade the father and mother of the damsel to tell what had happened. Our charlatan was not solicitous to divulge an affair which might increase the indignation of the Jews of Jerusalem, whither he was soon to repair to celebrate the passover. The account of this miracle seems to evince that the Son of God had acquired some smattering of medicine in Egypt. It appears that he was versant in the spasmodic diseases of women; and no more was wanting to induce the vulgar to regard him as a sorcerer, or performer of miracles.

Once in the way of performing wonders, Jesus did not rest satisfied with one merely. According to Matthew, (who alone relates the facts we are now to notice,) two blind men who followed him began to exclaim, *Son of David, have mercy on us*. Though Jesus, in his quality of God, knew the most secret thoughts of men, he chose to be *viva voce* assured of the disposition of the sick with whom he had intercourse. He asked, if they had much faith, or if they sincerely

believed that he was able to do what they requested of him. Our blind folks answered in the affirmative; then touching their eyes, "*Be it unto you*", said he, "*according to your faith*", and instantly they received their sight.

We know not how to reconcile such lively faith in two blind men, with their disobedience. Their physician, who might have good reasons for not being known, expressly forbade them to speak of their cure; they, however, spread it instantly through the country. The silence of those who were witnesses of this great miracle, is not more astonishing than the indiscretion of the blind men who were the objects of it. A fact still more miraculous is the obduracy of the Jews, who were so stubborn, that the many wonders performed one after another and on the same day, were not able to convince them. Jesus, far from being discouraged, determined still to exhibit specimens of his power. A dumb man, possessed with a devil, being presented to him, he expelled the demon and the dumb began to speak. At sight of this miracle, the people, as usual, were in extasy, whilst the pharisees and doctors, who had also exorcists among them, saw nothing surprising in it: they pretended that their exorcists performed their conjurations in the name of God, whilst Jesus operated in the name of the devil. Thus they accused Jesus of casting out the devil by the devil, which was indeed a contradiction. But this did not prove the divinity of Jesus; it proved only that the Pharisees were capable of talking nonsense and contradicting themselves, like all superstitious and credulous people. When theologists dispute, we soon discover that the wranglers on both sides speak nonsense; and, by contradicting themselves, impugn their own authority.

CHAPTER VIII

OF WHAT JESUS DID AT JERUSALEM DURING THE SECOND *PASSOVER* IN HIS MISSION

Our doctor having closed the first year of his mission in a glorious manner, he proceeded to Jerusalem, to try his fortune, and gather the fruits of his labour, or form a party in the capital, after having acquired adherents in the country. There was reason to expect that the wonders which he had performed the year preceding in Galilee, would have a powerful effect on the populace of Jerusalem; but they produced consequences opposite to those which Jesus had hoped for. It might be said that the infernal legion which he had sent into the swine of the Gerasenes, had returned and fixed their abode in the heads of the inhabitants of the country. The gospel shows in the former an incredible hardness of heart. In vain Jesus wrought before their eyes a multitude of prodigies, calculated to confirm the wonders related to them; in vain did he employ his divine rhetoric to demonstrate the divinity of his mission. His efforts served only to increase the anger of his enemies, and induce them to devise means to punish him whom they persisted in regarding as a juggler, a charlatan, and a dangerous impostor.

It is true, the adversaries of Jesus surprised him sometimes at fault—They reproached him with violating the ordinances of a law venerated by them as sacred, and from which he had promised never to depart. They regarded these violations as a proof of heresy, and it did not enter their heads that a God could raise himself above

ordinary rules, and possess the right of changing every thing. They were Jews, and therefore obstinately attached to their ordinances; and they did not conceive how a true messenger of God could allow himself to trample under foot, what they were accustomed to regard as sacred and agreeable to Deity.

So many obstacles did not discourage Jesus. He determined to succeed at any price; and though he might have foreseen what would be the issue of his enterprise, he was sensible he must conquer or die; that fortune favours only the brave; and that it was necessary to play an illustrious part, or tamely consent to languish in misery in the solitude of some obscure village in Galilee.

On arriving at Jerusalem, he devoted his attention to sick paupers—the rich had their own physicians. At this time there was in the city, and near the sheep port, a fountain, or pool, of which, with the exception of the gospel, no historian has ever spoken, though, it well deserved to be transmitted to posterity. It was a vast edifice, surrounded with five magnificent galleries, in the centre of which was a sheet of water, that possessed admirable properties; but these were known only to indigent people and mendicants; and they knew them, doubtless, by a particular revelation. Under these galleries were soon languishing a great number of sick persons, who patiently waited for a miracle. God, on giving to the water of this pool the faculty of curing all diseases, had annexed a condition to it—The first who could plunge therein after an angel had troubled it, which happened only at a certain time, could alone obtain the benefit of a cure. The chief magistrate of Jerusalem, who

probably knew nothing of the existence of this extraordinary fountain, had not established any regulation respecting it. The most forward and agile, and such as had friends always in readiness to lead them to the water when it was troubled, succeeded often in obtaining deliverance from their diseases.

A paralytic had been there for thirty-eight years, without any one having had the charity to lend him a helping hand in descending to the fountain. Jesus, who beheld him lying, asked him if he wanted to be cured? "Yes", answered the sick man, "but I have nobody to put me into the water when it is troubled." "That signifies nothing, (replied Jesus,) Arise, take up thy bed and walk." This wretched man, perhaps not unlike many of our beggars, who, to soften the public, feigned diseases, and who on this occasion might be gained over by some trifle to be accessory to the farce; this miserable, we say, did not leave him to speak twice — on the order of Jesus he took up his couch and departed.

This cure was performed on the Sabbath. Our paralytic having been met by a man of the law, the latter reprimanded him for violating the ordinances of religion by carrying his bed. The transgressor had no other excuse to give, but, that he who had cured him had commanded him so to do. He was then questioned about the person who had given this order, but he knew nothing of him. Jesus had not said who he was; and, as if the act had been very trifling, the person on whom the miracle was performed had not informed himself of the author of it. Here the matter ended; but Jesus having some time after met the paralytic, made himself known to him, and then the latter informed the Jews

of the name of his physician. The priests were so irritated, that from this instant they formed the design of putting Jesus to death, because, according to John, *he had done these things on the Sabbath day.*

It is not probable that this was the true cause of the rage of the Jews. However scrupulous we suppose them, it is presumed that their physicians did not think themselves obliged to refuse medicines to the sick on the Sabbath. Jesus, not content with curing, also authorised those he cured to violate the Sabbath by carrying their bed, which was a servile work; or rather these unbelievers regarded the miracles of the saviour as mere delusions, impostures, tricks of dexterity, and himself as a cheat who might excite disturbances.

Jesus, having learned that the Jews were ill-disposed towards him, attempted to justify himself. He made a speech to prove that he was the Son of God, and that his Father authorised him not to observe the Sabbath. But he took care not to explain himself very distinctly on this *filiation*, and by his ambiguous language, insinuated the eternity of his father, though he did not call him God. Yet the Jews, perceiving his object, were very much offended at this pretension. He changed, therefore, his ground and threw himself on the necessity by which he acted. "*Verily,*" said he to them, "*the Son does nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do. The Father, who loves him, sheweth him all things that he himself doeth, and he will show him greater works than these.*" By these expressions, Jesus seems to overthrow his own eternity and infinite knowledge; for he announces himself as susceptible of learning something, or as the pupil of the Divinity.

To impress the minds of these unbelievers, whom his enigmatical language could not convince, he declared that henceforth the Father would no longer interfere in judging men, but had devolved that care on his Son. This, however, had no effect; as the Jews expected a great judge, they were not yet staggered. Jesus, like our modern teachers, for want of better arguments proceeded to intimidate his audience, knowing well that fear prevents the exercise of reason. He gave them to understand, that the end of the world was near, which ought to make them tremble.

The testimony of John Baptist, had facilitated the first successes of Jesus; but the difference remarked between his conduct and that of the forerunner, destroyed the force of this testimony. Our orator pretended to have no need of it and endeavored to weaken its value. "*He was a burning and a shining light*" to them; "*you were willing for a season to rejoice in his light; I have a greater witness than his.*" Here he appealed to his own works, which he maintained to be infallible proofs of his divine mission. He undoubtedly forgot at this moment, that he spoke to people who regarded his marvellous deeds as delusions and impostures. His works were precisely the thing which it was necessary to prove even to the Jews, who saw them performed! This manner of reasoning has been since adopted with success by Christian doctors, who, when doubts or objections are advanced against the mission of Jesus, appeal to his miraculous works, which were at all times incapable of convincing the very persons whom they tell us had been witnesses of them.

Among the proofs employed by Jesus to exalt his mission, he advanced one, the tendency of which is to

destroy the mission of Moses, and cause him to be regarded as an impostor. He told them, *You have never heard the voice of my Father*; whilst it was on the voice of this Father, of whom Moses was the interpreter, that the law of the Jews was founded. After having annihilated the authority of scripture, our orator wished to prop his mission on the same scriptures, by which he pretended he was announced. "Fear" says he, "the Father; I will not be the person who will accuse you before him; it will be Moses, in whom you trust, because you believe not in him; for if you believed in him, you would also believe in me. I am come in the name of the Father, and you pay no attention to it; another will come in his own name, and you will believe in him."

The hearers of this sermon were not moved by it; they considered it unconnected, contradictory, and blasphemous; the fear of seeing the end of the world arrive, did not hinder them from perceiving the want of just inference in the orator, who took away from his Father, and restored to him the quality of judge of men, which he had at first appropriated to himself. Besides, it would appear the Jews were of good courage as to this end of the world, which events had so often belied. Their posterity, who beheld the world subsisting after this, notwithstanding the express prediction of Jesus and his disciples, have founded their repugnance for his doctrine, among other things, on this want of accomplishment. From his sublime discourse the incredulous conclude, that it is very difficult for an impostor to speak long without contradicting and exposing himself.

The inefficacy of this harangue convinced Jesus that it was in vain to rely on miracles, in order to draw over the

Jews of Jerusalem. He forbore to perform them, though the festival of the passover might furnish him with a favourable opportunity. It appears he was completely disgusted with the incredulity of these wretches, who showed themselves no way disposed to witness the great things which he had exhibited with success to the inhabitants of Galilee. To make miracles pass in a capital, there must be a greater share of credulity than in the country. Besides, if the populace are well disposed even in large cities, the magistrates and better informed oppose a bulwark to imposition. The same thing happened to Jesus in Jerusalem. Perhaps he despaired of the salvation of these infidels, for during the short time he sojourned in that city, he kept no measures with them, but loaded them with abusive language. It does not appear, however, that this plan gained proselytes, though since that time his disciples and the priests have frequently endeavored to succeed by similar means, and even by coercion.

In this journey, Jesus had no success—his disciples did not meet with good cheer; to sustain life they were reduced to the necessity of taking a little corn in the environs of the city; and were caught in this occupation on the Sabbath day. Complaint was made to their master; but no satisfaction could be obtained. He replied to the Pharisees, by comparing what his disciples had done with the conduct of David, who, on an emergency, ate, and also made his followers eat, the shew bread, the use of which was reserved for the priests, adding, that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath;" therefore, he concluded, "the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Critics have remarked in several circumstances of the life of Jesus, that he was frequently liable to commit mistakes. For example, on the occasion we speak of, he gave the name of *Abiathar* to the high priest who permitted David to eat the shew bread. The Holy Spirit, however, informs us, in the first book of Kings, that this high priest was called *Achimelech*. The error would be nothing if an ordinary man had fallen into it, but it becomes embarrassing in a man-God, or in God made man, whom we ought to suppose incapable of blunders.

On the same occasion, Jesus maintained that the priests themselves violated the Sabbath, by serving God in the temple on that day; and, this, according to the principles of theology, is confounding *servile* works with *spiritual*. But this is to have the same idea of a robbery and of an oblation; it is to tax God with being ignorant of what he did, by ordaining, at one and the same time, the observance and the violation of a day which he had consecrated to repose.

Our doctors further justify Jesus by saying, that, as God, he was absolute master of all things. But in that case he ought to have procured better fare for his disciples. It would not have cost him more to have permitted them to encroach on the table of some rich financier of Jerusalem, or even that of the high priest, who lived at the expense of God his Father, than to permit his followers to forage in the fields of the poor inhabitants of the country. At least it was previously necessary to verify such sovereignty over all things in the eyes of the Jews, who, from not knowing this truth, were offended at the conduct which the Son of God seemed to authorise. It is apparently on this principle

several Christian doctors have pretended, that *all things appertain to the just*; that it is permitted them to seize on the property of infidels and the unholy; that the clergy have a right to levy contributions on the people; and that the pope may dispose of crowns at his pleasure. It is on the same principle that actions are defended, which unbelievers regard as usurpations and violence, exercised by the Christians on the inhabitants of the new world. Hence it is of the utmost importance to Christians not to depart from the example which Jesus has given them in this passage of the gospel; it appears especially to concern the rights of the clergy.

Pretensions, so well founded, did not, however, strike the carnal minds of the Jews; they persisted in believing that it was not permitted to rob, particularly on the Sabbath; and not knowing the extent of the rights of Jesus, they considered him an impostor, and his disciples knaves. They believed him to be a dangerous man, who, under pretence of reformation, sought to subvert their laws, trample on their ordinances, and overturn their religion. They agreed, therefore, to collect the proofs they had against him, accuse, and cause him to be arrested. But our hero, who had information of their designs, frustrated them by leaving Jerusalem.

CHAPTER IX

JESUS WORKS NEW MIRACLES – ELECTION OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES.

As soon as Jesus was safe from the malice of his enemies, and found that he was among persons of more favourable

dispositions than the inhabitants of Jerusalem, he again commenced working miracles. His experience convinced him, that to gain the capital, it was necessary to augment his forces in the environs, and procure, in the country, a great number of adherents, who might, in due time and place, aid him in overcoming the incredulity of priests, doctors, and magistrates; and put him in possession of the holy city, the object of his eager desires.

These new prodigies, however, produced no remarkable effect. The Jews, who had been at Jerusalem during the passover, on returning home, prepossessed their fellow-citizens against our missionary. If he found the secret of gaining the admiration of the people in the places he passed through on leaving the capital, he had the chagrin to find opponents in the Pharisees and doctors. The following fact shows to what a degree the people were influenced:—On a Sabbath, Jesus entered the synagogue of a place, the name of which has not been preserved. He there found a man who had, or said he had, a withered hand. The sight of the diseased, who was, probably, some noted mendicant and knave, and the presence of the physician, excited the attention of the doctors. They watched Jesus closely — "*Let us see (said they, one to another) if he will dare to heal this man on the Sabbath day.*" But observing that Jesus remained inactive, they questioned him as to the Sabbath, for which he had, on so many occasions, shown but little respect. It was apparently one of the principal points of his reform, to abrogate a number of festivals. The doctors asked him, "*Master, is it lawful to heal on this day?*" He was frequently in the habit of answering one question by another: Logic was

not the science in which the Jews were most conversant. Jesus replied, "*Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day, or to do evil—to save life, or to take it away?*" This question, according to Mark, confounded the doctors. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe, unless we suppose the Jews to have been a hundred times more stupid than they really were, that this question was ill timed. They were prohibited from applying to servile occupations only, but must have been permitted to discharge the most urgent duties of morality even on the Sabbath day. It is to be presumed, that a midwife, for example, lent her ministry on that day, as on any other. It is stated in the Talmud, that it was permitted to annoint the sick with oil on the Sabbath. The Essenians observed the Sabbath with so much rigor, that they did not allow themselves to satisfy the most pressing wants of life. This, perhaps, gave occasion to the reproaches with which this sect loaded Jesus, who had by his own authority reformed this ridiculous custom.

Jesus continued his questions, and asked them if when a sheep fell into a ditch on the Sabbath, they would not draw it out. Hence, without waiting for an answer, he very justly concluded that it was permitted to do good on that day. To prove it, he said to the sick whom he had, perhaps, suborned to play this part in the synagogue, "*Arise, stand up, and stretch forth thy hand*", and immediately his hand became as the other. But Jesus, finding this prodigy produced no change in their minds, darted a furious look on the assembly, and, boiling with a holy choler, instantly forsook the detestable place. [Matt. xii. Mark xii. 6]

Jesus acted wisely; for these naughty doctors immediately took counsel with the officers of Herod, "how they might destroy him." Informed of everything by his adherents, he gained the sea shore, where it was always easy for him to effect his escape. His disciples, several of whom understood navigation, followed him. A number of people, more credulous than the doctors, resorted to him on the noise of his marvels. There came hearers from Galilee, from Jerusalem, from Idumea, from the other side of Jordan, and even from Tyre and Sidon. This multitude furnished him with a pretext for ordering his disciples to hold a boat in readiness, that he might not be too much thronged, but, in truth, to escape, in case it should be attempted to pursue him.

On this shore, favorable to his designs, Jesus performed a great number of miracles, and cured an infinity of people. We must piously believe it on the word of Matthew and Mark. These wonders were performed on the sick, and especially on the possessed. The latter, at whatever distance they perceived the Saviour, prostrated themselves before him, rendered homage to his glory, and proclaimed him the "Christ;" whilst he, always full of modesty, commanded them with threats not to reveal him; the whole to accomplish a prophecy, which said of him, *He shall not dispute, nor cry, nor make his voice be heard in the streets*; a prophecy, which, however, was frequently contradicted by his continual disputes with the doctors and Pharisees, and by the uproar he occasioned in the temple, in the streets of Jerusalem, and in the synagogues.

Nothing is more astonishing than the obstinacy of the devil in acknowledging Jesus, and confessing his divinity, and the stubbornness of the doctors in not recognizing him, in spite of his cares to make the one silent to convince the others. It is evident, that the son of God has come with the sole intent of preventing the Jews from profiting by his coming, and acknowledging his mission. It may be said that he has shown himself merely to receive the homage of satan; at least we perceive only the devil and his disciples proclaiming the character of Jesus.

When he had preached much, cured much, and exorcised much, our missionary wished to be alone to reflect on the situation of his affairs. With a view to enjoy more liberty, he ascended a mountain, where he spent the whole night. The result of his solitary reflections was that although he required assistants, he could no longer, without giving umbrage to the government, continue marching up and down with a company so numerous as that of the idlers who composed his suite.

When day appeared, he called those of his disciples whom he judged most worthy of confidence, and selected twelve to remain near his person. This is what Luke says; but Mark insinuates that he chose his twelve apostles on purpose to send them on a mission. As Jesus, however, assures us that he chose them *to be near him*, and as the apostles, content with begging and making provision for themselves and their master, did not perform any mission during his life, at least out of Judea, we shall adhere to the first opinion. The names of these apostles were Simon Peter, Andrew, Matthew, Simon-Zelotes, James, Philip, Thomas,

Jude, John, Bartholomew, another James, and Judas Iscariot, the treasurer.

As Jesus had no money to give his disciples, he told them no doubt to go and push their fortune. He, however, took care to impart to them his secret; to teach them the art of miracles, to cure diseases, and to cast out devils. He also gave them the power of remitting sins, and to bind and unbind in the name of Heaven; prerogatives, which, if they did not enrich the apostles, have been worth immense treasures to their successors. To them the roughest staff has become a *crozier*, a staff of command, making its power felt by the mightiest sovereigns of the earth. The *bag* or *wallet* of the apostles has been converted into treasures, benefices, principalities and revenues. Permission to beg has become a right to exact tithes, devour nations, fatten on the substance of the wretched, and enjoy, by *divine right*, the privilege of pillaging society, and disturbing it with impunity. The successors of the first missionaries of Jesus, though professing to be mendicants, enjoyed the prerogative of coercing all who refused to bestow charities on them, or to obey their commands. Many have imagined, that Jesus never concerned himself about the subsistence of the ministers of the church; but if we examine attentively the gospel, especially the Acts of the Apostles, we shall find the basis of the riches, grandeur, and even despotism of the clergy.

CHAPTER X

SERMON ON THE MOUNT – SUMMARY OF THE MORALITY OF JESUS – OBSERVATIONS ON THAT MORALITY

The dread of being arrested having constrained Jesus to abandon the cities, where he had many enemies, the country became his ordinary residence. The people, or at least some male and female devotees whom he had converted, furnished provisions to the *divine* man and his followers. Obligated to wander about, bury themselves in mountains and in deserts, and sleep in the open air, our apostles became discontented with their lot. In spite of the spiritual graces which they received in the society of the messiah, these carnal men expected something more substantial on devoting themselves to his service. They were doubtless promised important posts, riches, and power in the *kingdom* he was about to establish. Jesus on this account frequently experienced as much difficulty in retaining them as in convincing the rebellious Jews by his miracles and conclusive arguments. The measure of their appetite, and well being, was at this time the only rule of their faith. To prevent their murmurs, and familiarize them with a frugal life, which our missionary saw he would be obliged, perhaps for a long time, to make them lead, he pronounced an oration on true happiness: it is the one known by the name of the *Sermon on the Mount*, and related by Matthew, chap v.

According to our orator, true happiness consists in *poverty of Spirit*; that is, in ignorance, and contempt of knowledge, which bids us exercise our reason, and strips man of the blind submission that is necessary to induce him to submit to a guide. Jesus preached a pious docility, which implicitly credits everything without examination; and to tell them, that the kingdom of heaven would be the reward

of this happy disposition. Such is the sense which the church has given to the words of Jesus, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"

Among the apostles, there were some whose passionate dispositions might have been prejudicial to the progress of the sect. It may in general be presumed that rough men, devoid of education, have repulsive manners. Jesus demonstrated the necessity of meekness, civility, and patience, in order to gain proselytes; he recommended moderation and toleration as the certain means of insinuating themselves into the minds of men, of thriving in the world, and as the surest way of making conquests. This is the true sense of these words, "*Happy are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*"

Wishing to inspire them with courage, and console them for their miserable situation, he told them that *to live in tears is felicity, and an infallible method of expiating iniquity*. He promised that their vexations should not endure forever; that their tears should be dried up; that their misery should terminate; and that their hunger should be appeased. These consolations and promises were indispensably necessary to fortify the apostles against every accident which, in the course of their enterprises, might befall them in the retinue of a chief destitute of riches and power, and incapable of procuring to himself or others the comforts of existence.

Jesus, with a view, no doubt, of sweetening the lot of his apostles, recommended compassion to the listening multitude, of which he, as well as his party, stood in the greatest need. It is readily perceived that the messiah felt the most imperious necessity to preach charity to his auditors; for he

lived on alms, and his success depended on the generosity of the public and the benefactions of the good souls who hearkened to his lessons.

The preacher recommended peace and concord -- dispositions necessary to a new born, weak, and persecuted sect; but this necessity ceased when this sect had attained strength enough to dictate the law.

He afterwards fortified his disciples against the persecutions which they were to experience; he addressed their self love—spurring them on by motives of honor: "*Ye are (says he) the salt of the earth, the light of the world.*" He gave them to understand that they were the "*successors of the prophets*", men so much respected by the Jews: and, to share in whose glory, they ought to expect the same crosses which their illustrious predecessors experienced. He told them to regard hatred, persecution, contempt, and the deprivation of everything that constitutes the well being and happiness of man, as true felicity, and most worthy of heavenly rewards.

After haranguing his disciples, he addressed himself to the people. He presented to them a new morality, which, far from being repugnant to that of the Jews, could easily be reconciled with it. Things were not as yet sufficiently matured for abrogating the law of Moses: too great changes alarm mankind. A feeble missionary must at first confine himself to reforming abuses, without seeking to probe to the bottom. Jesus wisely contented himself with showing, that the law was faulty in some particulars, and that he proposed to perfect it. Such is the language, of all reformers.

Jesus expressly declared, that he was not come to destroy, but to fulfil the law: and he affirmed that, in heaven, ranks would be fixed according to the rigorous observance of all its articles. He insinuated, however, to his audience, that neither they, nor their doctors, understood any part of that law which, they believed, they faithfully practised. He undertook, therefore, to explain it; and as all reformers pretend to puritanical austerity, and to a supernatural and more than human perfection, he went beyond the law. The following is the substance of his marvellous instructions:

You have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be punished with death; but I say unto you, that it is necessary to extend this prohibition and punishment even to wrath, seeing it is wrath which urges one on to put his fellow creature to death. You would punish adultery only when it is committed; but I tell you, that desire alone renders one as culpable as fact. You, perhaps, will answer, that man is not the master of his passions and desires, and that he can hardly resist them: I agree with you in this; you have not any power, even on the hairs of your head. The penances, sacrifices, and expiations which your priests impose, are not capable of procuring the remission of your sins; behold, then, the only means of preventing them, or making reparation: has your eye, or any of your members solicited you to commit iniquity? Cut off that member, or pull out that eye, and cast it from you; for it is more expedient that one of your members should perish, than that the whole body be thrown into hell fire. If Moses, inspired by the

divinity, had known this hell, destined for your suffering eternal punishment, he would not have failed to menace you with it; but he was ignorant of the dogma of another life; he spoke only of the present, to which he has limited your misfortunes, or your felicity. Had it not been for this, he would not have neglected to acquaint you with a fact so well calculated to inspire you with fear, and render life insupportable.

We are quite surprised at finding, that Moses and the ancient Hebrew writers have nowhere mentioned the dogma of a future life, which now-a-days forms one of the most important articles of the Christian religion. Solomon speaks of the death of men by comparing it with that of brutes. Some of the prophets, it is true, have spoken of a place called *Cheol*, which has been translated *Hell (Enfer)*; yet it is evident, that this word implies merely sepulchre or tomb. They have also translated the Hebrew word *Topheth* into *Hell*: but on examining the word, we find that it designates a place of punishment near Jerusalem, where malefactors were punished, and their carcasses burned. It was after the Babylonish captivity that the Jews knew the dogma of another life, and the resurrection, which they learned of the Persian disciples of Zoroaster. In the time of Jesus, that dogma was not even generally received. The Pharisees admitted it, and the Sadducees rejected it.

You use too freely (proceeded our missionary) the permission of divorce; the least disgust makes you repudiate your wives; but I tell you, that you ought to repudiate them only when you have surprised them in adultery. It is cruel to stone one for this fault; we ought to

have respect for the weakness of the sex. Jesus, whose birth was very equivocal, had particular reasons for wishing that adultery should be treated with indulgence. Independently of Mary his mother, from whom Joseph was probably separated, our preacher had in his train dames, whose conduct had not been irreproachable anterior to their conversion. Besides Mary Magdalene, who was a noted courtesan, Jesus had in his suite Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, who, according to the tradition, robbed and forsook her husband to follow the messiah, and assist him with her property. Moreover, the indulgence which he preached must have gained him the hearts of all the ladies in his auditory.

The messiah continued nearly in these terms: — *God has of old promised you blessings, prosperity, and glory; but he has changed his intention, and revoked these promises. As you were almost always, and still are the most unhappy, the most foolish, and most despised people on earth, you ought to suspect that these pompous promises were mere allegories. You ought, therefore, to have an abject and mortifying morality, conformable to your genius, your situation, and your misery. If it does not procure you welfare in this world, you should hope that it will render you more happy in the next. Your humiliations are the certain means of attaining one day that glory, which hitherto neither you nor your fathers have ever been able to acquire. When therefore a person shall give you a blow on one cheek, offer him the other. Do not go to law — lawyers will ruin you; and, besides, the poor are always in the wrong when opposed to the rich. Give to whoever asks of you, and refuse nothing you possess; it is*

by relying on the punctual practice of this important precept, that I send my disciples into the world without money or provisions.

I do not give you any description of paradise – it is sufficient to know that you will be perfectly happy there. But to get there, it is necessary to be more than men – it is necessary to love your enemies; to render good for evil; to preserve no remembrance of cruel outrages; to bless the hand that strikes you; and not to speak one silly word; for one only will precipitate you into hell. Have a pleasant aspect when you fast; but especially live without foresight. Accumulate nothing, lest you excite the wrath of my father. Think not of tomorrow – live at random, like the birds that never think of sowing, gathering, or accumulating provisions. Detach yourselves from all things below – seek the kingdom of God, which I and my disciples will give you for your charities. This conduct cannot fail to plunge you into misery; but then you shall beg in your turn. God will provide for your wants – ask and it shall be given you. Do not beggars find, agreeably to our divine precepts, wherewith to live at the expense of the simpletons who labor? My disciples and I, are a proof that without toil, one may avoid difficulties, and not perish by hunger? If our manner of living appears not to agree with my language, I charge you not judge my actions, nor condemn your masters and doctors. Do not intermeddle with state affairs; – that care is reserved for me, and those in whom I confide. The master is superior to the disciple – it is to me in particular you ought to listen. If you call me master, it is necessary to do what I desire you. The practice of my morality is difficult, and even impossible to many persons; but the broad and easy way conducts to perdition; and to enter

heaven, it is necessary to be as perfect as my heavenly father. I must caution you against my enemies, or those who shall preach a contrary doctrine. Treat them as wolves; they are false prophets – show them no indulgence: for it is not to them that you ought to be humane, tolerant, and pacific.

In the course of his sermon Jesus taught them a short form of prayer, known by the name of *the Lord's prayer*. Though the Son of God may have shewn himself on this occasion the enemy of long prayers, the Christian church is full of pious sluggards, who, in spite of his decision, believe they cannot perform any thing more agreeable to God, than spending their whole time in mumbling prayers in a very low tone, singing them in a high one, and frequently in a language they do not understand. It appears, that in this, as in many other things, the church has rectified the practice of its divine founder.

Matthew informs us that the discourse, of which we have given the substance, transported the people with admiration, for Jesus instructed them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.—The latter, perhaps, spoke in a more simple manner, and consequently less admired by the vulgar, whose wonder is excited in proportion to their inability to comprehend, or practise the precepts given them. Thus the sermon of Jesus had not, at that time, any contradictors. It has however, furnished ample scope for dispute to our casuists and theologians. They have subtly distinguished between things which were merely of *counsel*, and those of *precept* which ought rigorously to be observed. It was soon felt, that the sublime morality of the Son of God did not suit mankind, and its

literal observance was destructive to society. It was, therefore, requisite to moderate it, and recur to that marvellous distinction, in order to shelter the honour of the divine legislator, and reconcile his fanatical morality with the wants of the human race.

Moreover, this discourse presents difficulties, which will always appear embarrassing to persons accustomed to reflect on what they read. They find that it is ridiculous and false to say, a law is accomplished, when it is proposed and permitted to violate it, and add or retrench the most essential points. Since the time of Jesus, why has the Jewish law been completely abrogated by Paul and his adherents, who ceceded from the Christian partizans of Judaism? Why do Christians entertain at present so much horror at that same Judaism, except indeed when the privileges and pretensions of the clergy are in question – articles on which our Christian priests are very judaical, and which they have prudently borrowed from Leviticus; all to supply the neglect of Jesus, who was not sufficiently attentive either to their temporal interests, *divine rights*, or sacred hierarchy? By what law do the inquisitors (if Christians) in Portugal and Spain burn those who are accused, or convicted, of having observed the usages of a law, which Jesus has declared he did not wish to *abolish*, but to *fulfil*? By what law have Christians, dispensed with circumcision, and permit themselves to eat pork, bacon, pudding, hare, etc? Why has sunday, or the day of the sun among Pagans been substituted for Sabbath or Saturday?

2dly, It is held unjust to punish in the same manner a man in a passion and a murderer. One may be in a passion

and restrain himself, or afterwards repair the injury; but he cannot restore life to a man whom he has deprived of it.

3dly, The restriction of divorce to the single case of adultery is a law very hard, and very prejudicial to the happiness of married persons. This precept compels a man to live with a woman who in other respects may be odious to him. Besides, it is generally difficult to convict a female of adultery; she usually takes precaution to avoid this. Is it not very grievous, and even dangerous to live with a person who occasions continual suspicions?

4thly, It is absurd to make a crime of *desire*, especially without supposing the *liberty* of man; but Jesus is not explicit on that important article. On the contrary, from the train of his discourse he appears to recognize the *necessity* of man, who has no authority over a single hair of his head. Paul, his apostle, declares in many places against the liberty of man, whom he compares with *a vessel in the hands of a potter*. But if there be no proportion between the workman and his work, if the latter has no right to say to the former, *why have you fashioned me thus?*, if there be no analogy between them, how can they bear any relation to each other? If God is incorporeal, how does he act upon bodies? or how can these bodies disturb his repose, or excite in him emotions of anger? If man is relatively to God as an *earthen vase*, this vase owes neither thanks nor adoration to the potter who gave him so insignificant a form. If this power is displeased with his own vessel because he formed it badly, or because it is not fit for the uses he intended, the potter, if he is not an irrational being, can only blame himself for the defects which appear. He no doubt can break it in pieces,

and the vase cannot prevent him; but if instead of forming it anew, and giving it a figure more suitable to his designs, he punishes the vase for the bad qualities he has conferred upon it, he would show himself to be completely deprived of reason. This, in fact, is the view which Christianity gives of its God. It represents mankind as having no more relation with the divinity than stones. But if God owes nothing to man; if he is not bound to show him either justice or goodness, man on his part can owe nothing to God. We have no idea of any relation between beings which are not reciprocal. The duties of men amongst themselves are founded on their mutual wants. If God has no occasion for these services, they cannot owe him anything; neither can they possibly offend him by their actions.

5thly, It is a strange remedy to cut off or pluck out a member every time it is the occasion of sin; it contradicts the precept not to make an attempt on one's life. Origen is blamed by the Christians for having performed an operation, which he no doubt judged necessary for preserving his chastity. It is not through the members, but the inclination, that a person sins: it is therefore absurd to say that one shall escape damnation of the body by depriving himself of a member. What would become of so many ecclesiastical libertines, if to appease the lusts of the flesh, and make reparation for scandal, they should take it into their heads to follow the counsel of Jesus?

6thly, The suppression of a just defence of one's person and rights against an aggressor or unjust litigant, is to overturn the laws of society. It is to open a door to iniquities and crimes, and render useless the exercise of justice. By

such maxims a people could not exist ten years. To *love* our enemies is impossible. We may *abstain* from retaliating on the person by whom we are injured; but love is an affection which can only be excited in the heart by a friendly object.

7thly, The counsel or precept, to possess nothing, amass nothing, and think not of the morrow, would be very prejudicial to families:—a father ought to provide a subsistence for his children. These maxims can suit sluggards only, such as priests and monks, who hold labor in horror, and calculate on living at the expense of the public.

8thly, It is now easy to perceive, that the promises made the Jews by the mouth of Moses, inspired by the divinity, have not been verified literally, and are only allegorical. But it was not from the Son of God that the Jews should have learned this fatal truth. Once imposed on, they ought to have dreaded being again deceived by another envoy. Like Jesus, Moses had made promises; like Jesus, Moses had confirmed his promises and mission by miracles; yet these promises have been found deceptive, and merely allegorical. This idea ought to have created presumptions against the promises of Jesus.

9thly, To say, that it is necessary to be *poor in spirit*, and to say afterwards that to attain heaven it is necessary to be perfect as the heavenly father is perfect, is to make God a stupid being; to afford to atheists a solution for all the evil they perceive in nature; and to assert that to enter paradise one must be a fool. But has man the power of being spiritual or poor in spirit, reasonable or foolish, believing or

unbelieving? Is not the holy stupidity of faith a gift which God grants only to whom he will? Is it not unjust to damn people of understanding?

Lastly, In this sermon Jesus recommends to beware of *false prophets*, and says, that it is by their works we shall know them. Yet, the priests tell us, "*We ought to do as they say, without imitating what they do*", when we find their conduct opposed to the maxims they preach. Another sign, therefore, than works ought to have been given whereby to recognize false prophets; otherwise the faithful will be reduced to believe that the clergy are provided only with lying prophets.

In this manner unbelievers argue; that is all those who have not received from heaven *poorness of spirit*, so necessary for not perceiving the want of inference, false principles, and numberless inconsistencies, which result from the morality of Jesus. This morality appears a divine *chef d'oeuvre* to docile Christians illuminated by faith; and it was much admired by those who heard it. We know not, however, if the auditors were so affected by it as to follow it literally. To admire a doctrine, and believe it true and divine, is a thing much more easy than to practice it. Many persons set a higher value on evangelical virtues, which are sublime in theory, than on moral virtues, which reason commands us to practice. It is not then surprising that the supernatural and marvellous morality of Jesus was applauded by those who heard it. It was addressed to paupers, the dregs of the people, and the miserable. An austere stoical morality must please the wretched; it transforms their situation into virtue; it flatters their vanity;

makes them proud of their misery; hardens them against the strokes of fortune; and persuades them that they are more valuable than the rich, who maltreat them; and that Deity, which delights in seeing men suffer, prefers the wretched to those who enjoy felicity.

On the other hand, the vulgar imagine that those who can restrain their passions, and deprive themselves of what excites the desires of others, are extraordinary beings, agreeable to God, and endowed with preternatural grace, without which they would be incapable of these exertions. Thus a harsh morality, which seems to proceed from insensibility, pleases the rabble, imposes on the ignorant, and is sufficient to excite the admiration of the simple. It is not even displeasing to persons placed in happier situations, who admire the doctrine, well assured of finding the secret to elude the practice of it by the assistance of their indulgent guides. There is only a small number of fanatics who follow it literally.

Such were the dispositions which must have induced so many people to receive the instructions of Jesus. His maxims produced a multitude of obstinate martyrs, who, in the hope of opening a road to heaven, set torments and afflictions at defiance. The same maxims produced penitents of every kind, solitaries, anchorites, cenobites, and monks, who, in emulation of each other, rendered themselves illustrious in the eyes of nations by their austerities, voluntary poverty, a total renunciation of the comforts of nature, and a continual struggle against the gentlest and most lawful inclinations. The counsels and precepts of the gospel inundated nations with a vast

number of madmen, enemies of themselves, and perfectly useless to others. These wonderful men were admired, respected, and revered as saints by their fellow-citizens, who, themselves deficient in grace or enthusiasm necessary for imitating them, or following faithfully the counsels of the Son of God, had recourse to their intercession, in order to obtain pardon for their sins, and indulgence from the Almighty, whom they supposed irritated at the impossibility in which they found themselves of following literally the precepts of Jesus. In fine, it is easy to perceive that these precepts, rigorously observed, would drag society into total ruin; for society is supported only because that most Christians, admiring the doctrine of the Son of God as divine, dispense with practicing it, and follow the propensity of nature, even at the risk of being damned.

In the gospel, Jesus threatens with eternal punishment those who shall not fulfil his precepts. This frightful doctrine was not contradicted in the assembly; the superstitious love to tremble; those who frighten them most, are the most eagerly listened to. This was undoubtedly the time for establishing firmly the dogma of the *spirituality* and *immortality* of the soul. The Son of God ought to have explained to those Jews, but little acquainted with this matter, how a part of man could suffer in hell, whilst another part was rotting in the earth. But our preacher was not acquainted with any of the dogmas which this church has since taught. He had not clear ideas of spirituality; he spoke of it only in a very obscure manner: "Fear, (said he, in one place,) him who can throw both body and soul into hell" — words which must have appeared unintelligible in a

language in which the soul was taken for the blood or animating principle. It was not till a long time after Jesus, and when some Platonists had been initiated in Christianity, that the spirituality and immortality of the soul were converted into dogmas. Before their time, the Jews and Christians had only vague notions on that important subject. We find doctors in the first ages speaking to us of God and the soul as *material* substances, more subtle indeed than ordinary bodies. It was reserved for latter metaphysicians to give such sublime ideas of mind, that our understandings are bewildered when employed on them.

CHAPTER XI

ACTIONS AND PARABLES OF JESUS – ENTERPRISE OF HIS RELATIONS AGAINST HIM – JOURNEY TO NAZARETH, AND THE SUCCESS JESUS HAD THERE

Though the obstinacy of the doctors of the law and principal men among the Jews created continual obstacles to the success of Jesus, he did not lose courage; he again had recourse to prodigies – the certain means of captivating the populace on whom he perceived it was necessary to found his hopes. This people were subject to diseases of the skin, such as leprosy and similar cutaneous disorders. No doubt can be entertained on this point when we consider the precaution which the law of Moses ordains against these infirmities. To establish his reputation, Jesus resolved to undertake the cure of this disgusting disease with which his countrymen were so much infected.

According to Luke, a leper prostrated himself at the feet of Jesus, and adored him, saying that he had heard him spoken of as a very able man, and that if he was inclined, he could cure him. On this, Jesus merely stretched forth his hand, and the leprosy disappeared. Hitherto, the messiah had only recommended it to those he cured to present themselves to the priests and to offer them the gift prescribed in such cases; but on this occasion he thought that he would reconcile them by strictly enjoining this mark of deference. He, therefore, exacted of the cured leper that he would satisfy the ordinance of the law; but at the same time recommended secrecy as to the physician's name—a secret which was no better preserved by him than by others. Jesus forgot that it was not sufficient to impose silence on the persons he cured, but that it was likewise necessary to lay a restraint on all the tongues of the spectators; unless indeed it is supposed that these miracles were performed with shut doors, and witnessed by the Saviour's disciples only; or, rather, that they were not performed at all.

Meanwhile, the leper's indiscretion was the cause why Jesus, according to Mark, no longer ventured to appear in the city. The priests seem to have taken in ill mood the cure he had performed: He therefore withdrew into the desert, where the more he was followed the more he buried himself in concealment. It was in vain that the people desired to hear him; it was in vain that the sick, who ran after him, requested their cure. He no longer suffered that marvellous virtue, calculated to cure every disorder, to exhale from him.

After having wandered for some time in the desert, ruminating on his affairs, he reappeared at Capernaum. The domestic of a Roman centurion, much beloved by his master, was at the point of death from an attack of the palsy. This Pagan believed that Jesus could easily cure his slave; but, instead of presenting him to the physician as he ought to have done, he deputed some Jewish senators to wait on him. However disagreeable this commission might be to persons whom the centurion had no right to command, and who by that step seemed to acknowledge the mission of Jesus, these senators performed it. Flattered with seeing an idolator apply to him, our miracle-worker set out immediately; but the centurion sent some of his people to inform Jesus that he was not worthy of the honour thus intended him by entering his house; and that to cure his servant it was sufficient to speak only one word. Jesus was delighted with this; he declared that *he had not found so much faith in Israel*; and with one word, if the gospel may be believed, he performed the cure. He afterwards told the Jews that if they persisted in their hardness of heart (the only disease which the Son of God could never cure, though he had come for that purpose,) the idolatrous nations would be substituted in their stead, and that God, notwithstanding his promises, would forever abandon his ancient friends. The gospel, however, does not tell us whether this centurion, so full of faith, was himself converted.

The day after this cure, Jesus having left Capernaum, arrived at Nain, a small town in Galilee, about twenty leagues distant, which proves that the messiah was a great walker. Fortunately he got there in time to perform a

splendid miracle. A poor widow had lost her son; they were already carrying him to be buried, and the disconsolate mother, accompanied by a great multitude, followed the funeral procession. Jesus, moved with compassion, approached the bier and laid his hand on it. Immediately those who carried it stopped. *Young man!* said he, addressing the deceased, *I say to thee, arise.* Forthwith, he who was dead sat up. This miracle terrified all the attendants, but converted nobody. The transaction is related by Luke alone; but even were it better verified, we might justly suspect that the disconsolate mother held secret intelligence with the performer.

Some historians have made John Baptist live to this period; others made him die much earlier. Here Matthew and Luke introduce the disciples or the precursor, on purpose to question Jesus on the part of their master. "*Art thou he that was to come, or look we for another?*" The messiah in reply worked miracles in their presence, cured the sick, cast out devils, and gave sight to the blind; after which he said to John's deputies, "*Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen.*" It was on this occasion that Jesus pronounced the eulogy of John. He had, as we have seen in chapter fourth of this history, his reasons for so doing. "*Amongst all those,*" said he, "*that are born of women, verily I say unto you there is not a greater than John Baptist.*" Our panegyrist profited afterwards by this circumstance to abuse the pharisees and doctors, who rejected both his baptism and John's. He compared these unbelievers to "*Children sitting in the market place, and calling to one another: We have piped to you, and you have not danced; we have chaunted*

funeral airs, and ye have not weeped." But we are not informed that this jargon converted the doctors.

After this our speech-maker compared his own conduct with that of the precursor. "*John,*" said he, "*came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say he hath a devil. I eat, drink, and love good cheer, yet you reject me also, under pretence that I keep company with men and women of bad reputation.*" He gave the populace, however, to understand that their suffrage was sufficient for him; as if he had told them, "I am certain of you—you are too *poor in spirit* to perceive the irregularity of my conduct—my wonders pass with you; you should not reflect; you are the true *children Of wisdom, which will be justified by you.*"

After this harangue, a Pharisee, who to judge of him by his conduct had been noways moved by Jesus, invited the orator to dinner, but he used him in the most unpolite manner. He did not cause his feet to be bathed, nor did he present perfumes according to the established custom of the Jews. Though Jesus might be offended at this omission, he did not decline sitting down at table; but while he was eating, a woman of bad fame bathed his feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and thereafter anointed them with a precious ointment. The Pharisee did not comprehend the mystery. Stupid and incredulous, he conjectured that Jesus did not know the profession of the female; but he was mistaken: the courtesan in question and all her family were intimately connected with the messiah. John informs us that she was called Mary Magdalane, and that she was the sister of Martha and Lazarus, people well known to Jesus, and who held a regular correspondence with him. In particular

it appears that Magdalane entertained the most tender sentiments for Jesus.

This action of the courtesan did not disconcert the Saviour; he explained her love, the attention paid him, and the kisses with which she loaded him, in a mystical and spiritual sense; and assuming the tone of one inspired, he assured her that her sins were forgiven on account of the love she had displayed. Luke informs us in the following chapter that Jesus had delivered this lady of *seven devils*—a service which well merited her gratitude. Be that as it may, Jesus employed this indirect way of showing the Pharisee the incivility of his behaviour to a man of his consequence.

The relations of Jesus, informed of the noise he made, and suspecting that he could not lead a very pure life among the gentry with whom he associated; or fearing that his conduct in the end would draw him into scrapes, went from Nazareth to Capernaum to seize him, and cause him to be confined. They were afraid of being involved in his disgrace, and chose rather to charge themselves with his correction, than to see him delivered up to justice; an event which they perceived was likely soon to happen. They therefore circulated a rumor, that he was a fool, whose brain was disordered. Jesus, informed of the motive of their journey, kept close, and had a prodigy in reserve the moment they should appear. The people, who had a hint of this, or were told of it by the emissaries of the messiah, repaired thither. As soon as the relations appeared, a blind and dumb man possessed with a devil was brought forth. Jesus exorcised him, the possessed was delivered, and the people were in ecstasies.

The doctors beheld with pain the credulity of the rabble, and foresaw the consequences of it. The kinsmen of Jesus, little affected by this miracle, promised to the doctors to use all their efforts to deliver him up to them. He is a sorcerer, said some; he is a prophet, said others; he must prove it, said a third; and, notwithstanding the great miracle he had performed, others added, *Let us ask of him a sign in the air.* "Good God!" said the Nazarenes, *"he is neither sorcerer nor prophet; he is a poor lad whose brain is disordered."*

These speeches being related to Jesus, he answered them by parables and invectives, and defended himself from the charge of being a wizard, by maintaining that it was absurd to suppose he cast out devils by the power of the devil. As to the imputation of folly, he repelled it with affirming that whoever should question his intellect, could not expect the remission of his sins either in this or in the other world. This undoubtedly is what must be understood by *the Sin against the Holy Ghost.*

Nevertheless the midway course of demanding a sign was followed; for this purpose a deputation was sent to Jesus; but instead of a sign in the air, he gave them one in the water. He referred our inquisitive folks to Jonas, and told them they should have no other sign; for, added he, *"As Jonas was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."* These Jews, who were neither wizards nor prophets, could not comprehend this language. Jesus, to whom miracles cost nothing when everything was arranged for performing them, did not risk himself by working them *impromptu*, or in the presence of those he judged acute

enough to examine them. On this occasion he put off these poor Jews, whom he calculated on converting to himself for ever, with an unintelligible answer.

Having refused to perform a prodigy in the air, he began to rail at them. He got into a passion, and launched out in prophetic invectives against the Jews. He compared the conduct of the queen of Sheba with theirs; boasted of *his* being greater and wiser than Solomon; and threatened to deprive them of the light which he shed in their country. We are of opinion, however, that, if he had deigned to give the sign demanded, he would have spread this light much further. But the messiah felt that a sign in the air was much more difficult than those he had given on the earth, where he was better able to arrange matters than aloft in the atmosphere, a region in which there was nobody to concert with.

Meanwhile Jesus' mother had joined her other children and relations in order to induce them to desist from their pursuit, but she could not prevail on them. They persisted in the design of apprehending our adventurer. As however, they could not penetrate through the multitude and get close up to him, they sent notice they were there. "*Behold*", said someone to Jesus, "*thy mother and thy brethren who seek thee.*" — Jesus, knowing the object of their visit which he was no ways eager to receive, abjured such forward relations; "*Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?*" said he; after which, stretching forth his hand towards the people, "*Behold*," added he, "*my mother and brethren; I know no other kinsmen than those who hearken to my word, and put it in practice.*" The people, flattered with the preference, took

Jesus under their protection, and the attempt of his family was thus turned to their confusion.

Escaped from this perilous adventure, afraid of being ensnared or mistrusting the constancy of the populace, who, notwithstanding the pleasure they found in seeing him perform his juggles, might desert him at last, Jesus thought proper to provide for his safety by leaving the town. He accordingly departed with his twelve apostles, the ladies of his train, Mary his mother, Jane and Magdalene, *who assisted the company with their property*. No doubt the last, who before she was with the messiah had made gain of her charms, was rich in jewels and ready money. This rendered her conversion of great importance to the sect, and especially to Jesus, who could not, without cruelty, refuse to repay so much love with a little return.

The persecution which Jesus experienced excited an interest in his behalf, and it would seem procured him greater countenance. A multitude of people impelled by curiosity, as soon as they knew the road he had taken, went out of the towns and hamlets in the environs to see him. To avoid being incommoded by the crowd, he again resolved to go on board a vessel, from which he preached to those on shore; but recollecting the trouble, which his former sermons had brought him into, he did not think it prudent to explain himself so clearly. He, therefore, preferred speaking in parables, which are always susceptible of a double meaning.

One day chagrined at his little success, he distinctly avowed that he had changed his resolution as to the Jews,

and meant to abandon their conversion. The reason for doing, so he expressed to them in parables; "*that seeing, they may not perceive, and hearing they may not understand, lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.*"

It must be owned that it is very difficult to reconcile this conduct of God. Were we not afraid of committing sacrilege by hazarding objections on the mission of Jesus, might it not be presumed that at first he had the design of giving laws to the Jews; but perceiving afterwards his little success, he resolved to seek his fortune elsewhere, and gain other subjects? What he communicated to his disciples in this secret view appears to have been for the purpose of preparing them for this change; but his punishment prevented all his designs, which were not executed till a long time after by his apostles, who no doubt carefully treasured up this conference.

We shall not enter into a detail of all the parables which Jesus employed in communicating his marvellous doctrine to the Jews, or preaching without being understood. Such a discussion would become very tiresome; we therefore advise those who may have a taste for such kind of apologues rather to read those of Esop or La Fontaine, which they will find more amusing and more instructive than the fables of Jesus. Those, however, who wish to consult the parables of the gospel, will find them in the following places:—The parable of the *sower*, Luke, viii. 5—of the *concealed lamp*, ib. viii. 16—of the *tares*, Matt. xiii. 24—of the *seed*, Mark iv. 26—of the *grain of mustard*, Matt. xiii. 31—of the *leaven*, ib. xiii. 33—of the *hidden treasure*, ib. xiii. 44—of

the *pearl*, ib. xiii. 45 — of the *net cast into the sea*, ib. 47 — and of the *father of the family*, ib. 52.

Jesus informed that his brothers and cousins were from home, went to Nazareth accompanied with his apostles. He perhaps wanted to convince his countrymen that he was not such a fool as was reported. Probably he hoped to confer with his family, and gain them over to his party. He arrived on the Sabbath, and repaired to the synagogue: immediately the priest very politely presented him with a book; he opened it, and stumbled precisely on this passage of Isaiah: "*The spirit of the Lord has rested upon me, and therefore I am anointed to preach.*" Having shut the book, he delivered it to the priest and sat down; but he did not neglect to apply to himself this passage of the prophet, where also mention is made of miracles and prodigies. There were present, either by chance or design, several Galileans, who having been witnesses of the marvels Jesus had previously performed, did not hesitate to bear testimony in his favour. But the Nazarenes, who knew what to think of him, were shocked at his magisterial tone. "*Is not this*", said they to one another, "*the carpenter, the son of Joseph the carpenter? Is not his mother called Mary? Are not his brethren and sisters with us? Whence then has he so much skill? How, and by what means does he work miracles?*"

Jesus, hearing these remarks, saw plainly that this was not the proper place for performing prodigies. But he wished that his inaction might be attributed to the evil dispositions of his countrymen, who were surprised to hear the sagacity and power of a man extolled whose conduct appeared to them very equivocal. "*I perceive*", said Jesus to

them, "*that you apply to me the proverb, 'Physician cure thyself'; and that, to prove the truth of what you have heard of me, you wish me to perform some of those miracles which I have elsewhere exhibited; but I know I shall labour in vain in this city: I am too well convinced of the truth of the proverb, No man is a prophet in his own country.*" To justify himself he quoted examples which would seem to throw a suspicion on the miracles of the prophets of the Old Testament, whom this proverb, even by itself, was calculated to make pass for knaves. Whatever opinion we may form of this, he cited the example of Elias, who, among all the widows of Israel, did not find one more deserving of a miracle than her of Sarepta, a woman of the country of the Sidonians. In the days of Elias, Judea was overrun with lepers; and yet the prophet cured Naaman, who was a Syrian and an idolater, in preference to his countrymen.

This harangue, which insinuated the reprobation and perversity of the audience, excited their rage so much that they dragged the orator out of the synagogue, and led him to the top of a mountain with an intention to throw him down headlong; but he had the good fortune to escape, and thus avoid the fate which was intended him in the place of his nativity. Matthew, speaking of this journey to Nazareth, says that his master did not perform many miracles there on account of the unbelief of the inhabitants. But Mark says positively, that he could not do any, which is still more probable.

Our luminous interpreters and commentators believe, that Jesus escaped only by a miracle out of the hands of the Nazarenes. But would it have cost him more to perform a

miracle in order to convert them, and thereby prevent their mischievous designs? This was all that was required of him, in order to save himself and place his person in security. Jesus never performed miracles but with certain loss; he always dispensed with working any when they would have been decisive, and beneficial.

CHAPTER XII

MISSION OF THE APOSTLES – THE INSTRUCTIONS JESUS GAVE THEM – MIRACLES WROUGHT UNTIL THE END OF THE SECOND YEAR OF HIS OWN MISSION

Dissatisfied with his expedition to Nazareth, Jesus went to Upper Gallilee, which had already been the theatre of his wonders. He found the disposition of the inhabitants of that country better adapted to his purpose. He perceived, however, that the necessity they were under of suspending their labor to come and hear him, kept a great number at home. This consideration obliged him to disperse his apostles by two and two in the province. It is probable he resolved on this dispersion because he found his own sermons and prodigies did not gain many proselytes. The continual enterprises of his enemies made him feel the necessity of increasing his party.

It appears that Jesus had already sent several of his disciples on missions, retaining near himself his twelve apostles only. It may, however, be presumed, that these preachers were as yet mere novices, as their labors were unsuccessful, the devils obstinately resisting their exorcisms. Yet this want of success was owing solely to the

weakness of their faith, and would seem to throw a shade on the foresight and penetration of their divine master. Why did he send missionaries whose dispositions were not sufficiently known to him? Besides, it belonged to him alone to bestow on them a necessary stock of faith for their journey.

Whatever opinion may be formed of this, those of the apostles, who never quitted their master, who saw him continually operating, who enjoyed his confidence, and had faith from the first hand—were better qualified than the others to labor to the satisfaction of the public. Fully resolved to make a desperate effort, Jesus renewed all their powers, and gave them his instructions, of which the following is the substance: *"Everything being well considered, do not go among the Gentiles, for our Jews will charge it as a crime against you, and as a reproach against me. It is true, I have already threatened to renounce them, but it is still necessary to make one attempt more; you will therefore preach to the Jews only. Repentance supposes sobriety and few wants; hence the inutility of riches. I have no money to give you, but strive to pick up for yourselves what you can. Providence will provide for you; if he takes care of the sparrows, he will take care of you. Moreover expect to be ill received, reviled, and persecuted; but be of good courage; all is for the best. Silence is no longer requisite; preach openly and on the house tops what I have spoken to you in secret. Inform the world that I am the messiah, the son of David and the Son of God. We have no longer to observe discretion; we must either conquer or die; away then with pusillanimity.*

"Though I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, explain to the good people that you are under the safeguard of the Most High, who will take a terrible revenge for the outrages offered you, and liberally reward those who welcome you. You do not require to concert measures for supplying your wants; it belongs to those whose souls you are going to save to provide you in necessities for the body. Carry not therefore either gold, or silver, or provision, or two suits of raiment; take a good cudgel, and depart in the name of the Lord.

"Take care in your way always to preach that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Speak of the end of the world: this will intimidate women and poltroons. On entering cities and villages, inform yourself of such credulous people as are very charitable and prepossessed in our favor. You will salute them civilly; saying Peace be to this house. But the peace you bring must be allegorical; for my doctrine is calculated to create trouble, discord, and division everywhere. Whoever would follow me, must abandon father, mother, kinsmen, and family; we want only fanatics and enthusiasts, who attaching themselves wholly to us, trample every human consideration under foot. I came not to send peace, but a sword. As a like conduct might embroil you with your hosts, you will change your abode from time to time. Do not rely on the power I have of raising the dead the safest way for you is not to risk your being killed; shun therefore places where you may be menaced with persecution. Abandon disobedient cities and houses, shaking the dust from off your feet. Tell them, that they have incurred the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah. Declare, in my name, that the divine vengeance is ready to make them sensible of their guilt, and that the inhabitants of these cities

will be less rigorously punished than those who shall have the audacity to resist your lessons. The great and last day is at hand. I assure you that you will not have finished your tour through all the cities of Israel before the son of man shall arrive."

Such is the sense and spirit of the instructions which Jesus gave to his apostles. In charging them to divulge his secret, he gave them a commission, which, notwithstanding his omnipotence, he himself dared not execute. But it was a grand policy to have instruments to act without exposing himself to personal injury.

These trifles, however, scarcely merit notice:—We are more surprised to find the Son of God proclaiming peace and charity, and at the same time asserting that he brings war and hatred. It is without doubt a God only who can reconcile these contradictions. It is besides unquestionable, that the apostles and especially their successors in the sacred ministry have, in preaching their gospel, brought on the world troubles and divisions unknown in all other preceding religions. The incredulous, who by the way refer to the history of the church, find, that the *glad tidings* which a God came on purpose to announce, have plunged the human race into tears and blood.

It is obvious from this language, that Jesus charged people of property with the maintenance of his apostles. Their successors have taken sufficient advantage of this, and through it assumed an authority to exercise the most cruel extortions on impoverished nations. Would not the Almighty have rendered his apostles more respectable by rendering them incapable of suffering, and exempting them

from the wants of nature? This would have given more weight to their sublime sermons and those of their infallible successors.

Critics maintain also, that it was false to say eighteen hundred years ago that *the end of the world was near*, and still more false to affirm that the great Judge would arrive before the apostles could make the tour of the cities of Israel. It is true, theologians understand that the end of the world shall happen when all the Jewish cities, that is, when all the Jews shall be converted. Time will demonstrate whether it be in that sense we ought to understand the words of Jesus: meanwhile the world still remains, and does not appear to threaten speedy ruin.

It is probable that, besides these public instructions, Jesus gave more particular ones to his apostles. They departed in the hope of charities which they were to receive from Jews, of whom the greatest number were already in a state of reprobation. Jesus altered his orders in part; he reserved for himself the cities, and left the villages to his apostles. Accordingly they went here and there, calling out, *Hearken to the glad tidings; the world is near its end. Repent therefore, pray, fast, and give us money and provisions, for having acquainted you with this interesting secret.* We are assured that they cured several diseases by the application of a certain oil. They had doubtless done more excellent things, but the *paraclete* (the comforter) was not yet come: maugre the instructions of the Son of God, the understandings of the apostles were not yet sufficiently brightened; for we do not find that the missionaries, with their balsam and fine speeches, made any converts. The incredulous are still much

surprised to find in the instructions of Jesus to his apostles, an explicit order to labor only for the conversion of the Jews, and an express prohibition against preaching to the Gentiles. They maintain, that a righteous God could make no distinction of persons; that the common father of mankind must show an equal love to all his children: that it cost no more to the Almighty to convert and save all nations; that a God, who is friendly to one country only, is a God purely local, and cannot be the God of the universe; and that a God partial, exclusive, and unjust, who follows caprice alone in his choice, can neither be perfect nor the model of perfection. In short, those who have not the happiness of being *sacredly* blinded by faith, cannot comprehend how the equitable and wise Lord of all the nations of the earth could cherish exclusively the Jewish people; his infinite prescience ought to have shown him that his love and favors would be completely lost on this untractable people.

Unbelievers remark, that it does not become the Son of God to exclaim, "*Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.*" Would it not have been wiser to have gone and preached to cities so docile, where Jesus was certain of success, than to persist in preaching to the Jews, of whom he was not certain of making converts?

Jesus went about preaching through many cities of Galilee; but deprived of the assistance of his confidants, he did not work any wonders. We have seen the magistrates and the great paying little attention to his conduct. They

despised one whom they regarded a vagrant, or a fool little to be feared. 'Tis true, that some of Herod's officers are said to have been on the watch, with the pharisees, to destroy him; but this combination had no success. After all, he gave umbrage only to the priests and the doctors of the law, against whom he declaimed with the greatest indecorum. By this conduct he rendered himself agreeable to the people, weary of the extortions of these bloodsuckers, who, without pity, drained the nation, treated the poor with disdain, and, as the parable of the priest and the Samaritan evinces, were destitute of charity. The priests and doctors were very numerous in Jerusalem; on which account the people in the capital were less disposed than elsewhere to listen to our preacher, and the influence of the priests was the cause of the hatred and contempt entertained against him in this great city.

By a singular contrariety, the most obscure interval in our hero's life was that wherein he acquired the greatest renown. Jesus was wholly unknown at the court of Herod; while at the head of his troop, and surrounded by multitudes, he chased away devils, gave sight to the blind and speech to the mute, expelled the sellers from the temple, and raised the dead. But while he led a private life in Galilee; when, during the mission of his apostles, he found himself alone and without followers, and content with preaching repentance, it was then that his fame, penetrating even to the throne, excited in the monarch a desire to see him. According to Luke, a ray of light struck the heart of Herod; doubt filled his mind; "*John*", said he, "*I have caused to be beheaded, but he must have risen from the dead,*

and, therefore, it is that so many miracles are performed by him; but who should this be of whom I hear such great things?" Herod wished to see Jesus to explain these matters, and for this purpose he sent for him.

If nature had given Jesus a right to the throne of Judea, we might judge his motives for not putting himself in the power of a prince, the usurper of his crown. But Jesus could not dissemble that his pretensions were not well established; he knew that for a long time the family of David had lost the sovereign power. We must, therefore, search for another motive for his refusing to see Herod, as the interview with the Son of God would not only have contributed to the conversion of this prince and his court, but of all Judea, and perhaps of the whole Roman empire. A single miracle of consequence, performed before a court, and acknowledged and attested by persons of high authority, would have been more effectual than the suspected testimony of all the peasantry and vagabonds in Galilee. Far from complying with the request of Herod, and conferring so eminent a benefit, Jesus withdrew into a desert as soon as he learned the prince's intention. He, who often uttered the most terrible curses against such as rejected him, scorned the invitation of a sovereign, and fled into a desert, instead of laboring for his conversion. The messiah, who made no difficulty in entering the house of a centurion to heal his slave, refused to visit a monarch in order to cure his blindness, and bring back to himself all his subjects, for whom, he affirmed, that he was specially sent!

Our theologians explain these contradictions by referring to the inexplicable decrees of Providence. But the incre-

dulous maintain, that Jesus, who well knew how to work wonders in the eyes of a simple populace, dared not to expose himself before an enlightened court; and it must be owned, that the manner in which he comported himself before his judges, strengthens this opinion.

Meanwhile, the mission of the apostles expired. In a short time they had traversed Galilee; and it appears from the repast which Jesus soon after gave to a crowd of people, that the preaching of his missionaries had procured an abundant harvest. Loaded with the alms of the Galileans, the apostles returned to their master, who again found himself incommoded by the multitude which flocked to see him. To enjoy more liberty, the party embarked on board a small vessel, which conveyed them across the sea of Galilee. There, in a retired spot, the apostles gave an account of the success of their mission; they made arrangements for the future, and especially secured their provisions in a place of safety.

Those who had seen Jesus embark, thought, perhaps, they were forever to be deprived of the pleasure of seeing him perform wonders. They made the tour of the lake, and though on foot, reached the other side before Jesus arrived there in his vessel. He preached, wrought miracles, and cured the diseased; and these labors lasted until the evening. His disciples then advised him to send the people in search of lodging and victuals in the neighboring villages. He made no reply on the article of lodging;—there were doubtless few persons in this multitude who were accustomed to sleep on down.—Besides, the nights were likely not cold in that season and climate. But, wishing to

amuse himself with the embarrassment of those who made the proposal, and who might not know the resources which the collections of his apostles had procured, "*it is not necessary*", said he, "*that they should go into the villages; give them yourselves wherewith to eat.*" "*Think you so?*" replied they, – "*shall we go and buy two hundred penny-worth of bread, and give them to eat?*" – Philip, who perhaps was not in the secret, represented the impossibility of finding bread to feed this multitude. On which Jesus said to Peter, "*See how many loaves you have.*" He found none – a circumstance the more surprising, as, according to Mark, they had withdrawn to this place "*on purpose to eat.*" Peter, without answering the question, said to his master, "*There is a young lad here, who has five barley loaves and two small fishes.*" Jesus ordered them to be brought, and made the multitude range themselves in companies of hundreds and of fifties. From this arrangement it appeared that there were five thousand men, besides women and children. When every one had taken his place on the grass, Jesus, according to the usage of the Jews, blessed the loaves and fishes, broke, and distributing them among the apostles, who gave thereof to the people as much as they desired. They likewise filled twelve baskets with the fragments of this celebrated entertainment. The guests, penetrated with admiration, exclaimed, "*This is of a truth a prophet, and that prophet who should come into the world*", which, translated into ordinary language, means, the true Amphitriton is he who gives us our dinner. The apostles spoke not a word.

Some critics, perceiving the impossibilities this miracle presents, have ventured to doubt the truth of it, as if the

impossibility of things could prejudice the reality of a miracle, the essence of which is to produce things impossible. Yet if attention is given to the account of the evangelists, who are not, however, very unanimous on particulars, we shall find, that this miracle presents nothing impossible if we are inclined to give any credit to the prudence of the Son of God; who, on this occasion, found that he could not make a better use of the provisions amassed by his apostles, than to distribute them to a hungry multitude. By this act, he saw himself certain of gaining their favor. It may be the crowd was not quite so numerous as is related. Besides, our apostles, in passing to the opposite shore, might have thrown their nets with sufficient success to furnish fish for the whole company. This meal must have appeared miraculous to persons who knew that Jesus had no fortune, and lived on alms. We accordingly find, that the people wanted to proclaim king the person who had so sumptuously regaled them. The entertainment no doubt recalled to their mind the idea of a messiah, under whose government abundance was to reign. No more was requisite to induce a handful of miserales to believe, that the preacher, who by a miracle fed them so liberally, must be the extraordinary man the nation expected.

This great miracle then will become very probable, by supposing that the apostles in their collection had received a large quantity of bread. They amused themselves, as has been observed, with fishing while they crossed the lake; Jesus gave them the hint:—when evening was come, things were disposed without the observation of the people, who

were thus fed with provisions amassed by very natural means.

Though the Galileans wished to proclaim Jesus king, he did not think proper to accept an honor which he found himself for the present incapable of supporting. His exhausted provisions did not suffer him to undertake the frequent entertaining of so many guests at his own expense; and though this conduct, much more than all his other miracles, would have gained him the affections of the beggars, idlers, and vagabonds of the country, the necessity of his affairs prevented him from recurring to it.

Thus Jesus crowned the second year of his mission with an action well adapted to conciliate the love of the people, and at the same time give uneasiness to the magistrates. This stroke of eclat must doubtless have alarmed those in power, who perceived that the affair might become very serious, especially considering the intention of the Gallileans to proclaim our adventurer king. The priests probably profitted by these dispositions in order to destroy Jesus, who at all times appeared anxious to gain the populace, in order to aid him in subduing the great. This project might have succeeded if Judea, as in times past, had been governed by kings of its own nation, who, as the Bible shows, depended continually on the caprice of priests, of prophets, or of the first comer, who by predictions, declamations, and wonders, could, at will, stir up the Hebrew nation, and dispose of the crown: whereas in the time of Jesus the Roman government had nothing to fear from the efforts of superstition.

CHAPTER XIII

JESUS REPASSES INTO GALLILEE ABOUT THE TIME OF THE THIRD PASSOVER IN HIS MISSION—WHAT HE DID UNTIL THE TIME HE LEFT IT

The expression of John, who tells us that *Jesus knowing* the guests he had entertained *would come and take him by force on purpose to make him their king*, demonstrates that these guests had withdrawn at the end of the entertainment. This observation enabled us to fix pretty correctly the route of Jesus, and affords a reason for his conduct.

It was already late when the disciples said to their master, that it was time to send away the people. The preparations for the repast must have consumed time: the distribution of the victuals required also some hours; so that daylight could not have been far off when the meal was finished, and when Jesus dismissed his guests. It was about the evening he learned the design they had of carrying him off to make him king; and it was not until after having received this intelligence, that he resolved to conceal himself in a mountain, after having dispatched his disciples to Capernaum. To reach the place, the latter were obliged to make several tacks; when Jesus, observing this, changed his resolution, and set out for Gennesaret, on the north side of the lake. Seeing him approach at the moment they thought him far off in the recesses of the mountain, his disciples were terrified; *they took him for a spirit*, for spirits were very common in Judea. They were confirmed in their opinion when they perceived his shadow near the vessel. Simon

Peter observing him advance, did not doubt but he was walking on the waters. In attempting to go and meet his master, he felt himself sinking; but Jesus took him by the hand, and saved him from the danger. After reprimanding him for his cowardice, he went with him on board the ship. The apostles, who had not been much struck with the miracle of the five loaves, were astonished at this. They had been in great fear, and fear disposes to believe; in their distress they confessed unanimously *that he was the Son of God*.

Jesus reached Gennesaret at noon. There several of his guests recognized him, and announced his arrival to others. They presented him the diseased, and he performed a great number of cures. We cannot too much admire the faith of the Galileans, who exposed at all seasons their sick in the streets, and the complaisance of Jesus, who indefatigably cured them.

The guests at the miraculous supper, whom their affairs called home, had returned; but the greatest number, that is, all the laboring people, having seen Jesus' ship steer for Capernaum, had set out by land for that city. Some vessels from Tiberias arrived there at the same time, but none carried Jesus, and nobody had seen him; for he had made his passage during night. The crowd, however, remained, in hopes of being again entertained *gratis*, when they learned at Capernaum that Jesus was on the opposite shore. Immediately, all our idle folks set out, either by land or by water, to visit him. But these parasites, instead of finding a repast served out on the grass, were entertained with a sermon. Jesus, who had not always wherewith to defray the

expenses of so numerous a court, held forth to them this language: "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek me, not because you saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.*" "*Labour*", added he, "*for life everlasting.*" – " His hearers, whose ideas extended not beyond the present life, did not comprehend what Jesus meant; they therefore asked him what it was requisite they should do; on which he told them that it was necessary they should become his disciples, as he was the messiah. Here we are surprised to find them asking of Jesus, What sign showest thou then that we may believe? What extraordinary thing do you perform for that purpose? You will perhaps instance the supper you gave us; but did not our fathers eat manna in the desert for forty years? And after all, what is your supper in comparison with that wonder?

From this we may perceive that Jesus labored in vain to draw over these Galileans to his party. The continuation of the miraculous repast was alone capable of moving them. It was to no purpose Jesus maintained, that the bread with which Moses had fed their fathers, was not the bread of heaven, which alone could properly nourish. *An empty belly has no ears*; so they suffered him to preach on. After he had spoken a great deal—Well, said they, give us this bread which alone nourishes, for it signifies little to us what kind of bread we eat; but some we must have. Promise to furnish us with it at all times, and at this price we shall be at your devotion.

If Jesus at this moment had possessed the same resources as formerly, he would have been able, at little expense, to form a small army, which the assurance of having food

without toil would have soon increased; but all failed. These people offered themselves providing he would always furnish them with bread. The proposition was urgent, and Jesus got off with so bad a grace, that his disciples themselves were shocked at it. He said to them, that he himself was bread, that his flesh was meat, and his blood wine; and that those only who eat it would be raised up, and conducted to everlasting banquets. Our dull folks comprehended none of this mysterious jargon, contrived on purpose to puzzle them. Perceiving that they were not moved by it, he informed them that in order to follow him, a particular *call* was necessary, and that as they were not disposed to do this, they were, therefore, not called.

The adherents Jesus obtained on this occasion were but few. The Jews were indignant that he should pretend to have descended from heaven. We *know*, said they, his *father and mother*, and we *know where he was born*. These rumors, spreading as far as Jerusalem, so irritated the priests that they resolved on his death; but the son of God, by skilful marches and countermarches, disconcerted their vigilance. It was especially in the capital that they wished to ensnare him; but Jesus had not been lately there. His distance from the metropolis did not, however, prevent them from knowing his most secret proceedings; and from this he concluded there were some false brethren among his disciples. He was not deceived; but the fear of being betrayed in a country where his resources began to fail, induced him to dissemble till he should arrive in a place of safety. He set out, therefore, for Capernaum. At this place he recited nearly the same sermon he had in vain preached

to the Gallileans. But no one would consent to receive as food his flesh and blood. Those who enjoyed his confidence knew that he gave better cheer; but his other disciples asserted that they could not subsist on this mysterious mess, and took their leave of him. Unable to do better, Jesus was obliged to let them depart.

Observing the defection of a part of his followers, our adventurer was vexed at it; and, in sorrow for the injuries it would occasion, he asked the twelve, "*And will you also leave me?*" On which Simon Peter answered, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure, that thou art the Christ, the son of the living God.*" Thus Jesus was assured, in the best way he could, of the fidelity of his apostles; yet we see, in spite of his infinite knowledge, that he always kept the traitor Judas in his company, though he must have foreseen that he would deliver him up to his enemies.

Meanwhile, Jesus set out for Galilee, whither his apostles followed him, though his last preaching, and particularly the refusal of victuals, had dissatisfied the Galileans. They did not, indeed, give him a welcome reception. The arrival of some Pharisees and doctors from Jerusalem completely marred everything. They were deputed by the chiefs in the capital to watch the conduct of Jesus, and to put the people on their guard. Everyone knows how strictly the Jews adhere to the ceremonies of their law; and, in spite of his protestations of attachment to it, Jesus, like his trusty friends, observed none of its ordinances. It was particularly offensive that they ate without washing their hands. But he defended himself with saying that it was better to violate

traditions and neglect ceremonies than to infringe the commandments of God, as the doctors did. He advanced, contrary to express law, *that nothing which enters the body defiles it, and that it is what comes out of it that renders it impure.* This seems to establish, that Jesus and his party were not scrupulous as to their victuals. Thereafter he launched out in invectives against the doctors, whom he called hypocrites, ignorant and blind, who directed others that were also blind. In his anger he did not perceive that the compliment was not less offensive to the people than to their guides. On this account the latter entertained a deep resentment, but the populace did not regard it. Besides, Jesus did not allow them time for reflection: he engaged their attention by a fine discourse, to prove that lawyers and priests were the worst of men and the least charitable, and, that none could be happy, either in this world or in the other, without becoming his disciples.

He was now informed that there was no safety for him in this place. He therefore left it in great haste, intending to go towards the frontiers of Tyre and Sidon. His design was to live concealed in the country; but with such great renown as that of our hero it was difficult to continue long unknown. The secret of his retreat was divulged; and, as misfortune sometimes turns to good, this trifling duplicity gave him an opportunity of performing a miracle among the Gentiles. A woman of Canaan besought him to deliver her daughter from a devil that tormented her. Jesus at first made her no answer. She insisted; the apostles interceded, and pressed their master to grant her request, merely to silence her; for she was clamorous, and might have disclosed that he was

the messiah. He defended himself on the plea of being sent to the Jews only, and not to the Heathen. They again besought him, and answered his comparison by another. He at length yielded; and the girl was delivered from her devil, or her vapors.

The success of Jesus in this country terminated with this miracle. He passed into Decapolis, and there acquired some consequence from the cure of a dumb and deaf man on pronouncing the word *Epheta*, and then putting his finger into his ears and spittle on his tongue. Our missionary on this occasion made a sufficiently abundant harvest of alms. He moreover wrought a number of miracles on the sick, the cripple, and the maimed. But it was his custom to steal away when his miraculous power began to make a noise; he accordingly withdrew to a mountain at the distance of three days journey from the place where he had performed so many miracles. The people followed him in his retreat, and it appears that they did so without eating. Loaded with provisions or money procured by his miracles, Jesus again saw himself in a situation to lay the table cloth. As if he knew nothing of this, he asked one of his apostles how many loaves they had: seven was the answer. He then ordered the multitude to sit down on the ground; and taking the loaves, blessed them, together with some small fishes. These were distributed to four thousand men, besides women and children, who were all satisfied; and with the remains of the repast, they afterwards filled seven baskets.

This prodigy appears to be a mere repetition of what we have related before; yet St. Chrysostom maintains, that the

difference of the number of baskets proves irrefragably they must not be confounded. Admitting this, it would appear that Jesus once more sacrificed the money and provisions his prodigies had enabled him to amass. It was necessary to gain the people, and he at that time felt he had very great need of them; he was generous when he had the means to be so, and he had not forgotten that they had promised to follow him, provided he would give them food.

The evangelists, however, overheated with the idea of this miracle, forgot another equally deserving their notice. It was indeed a prodigy to see four thousand men, without reckoning, women and little children, following Jesus during three days without eating or drinking; or else we must believe, that, prepared to travel, these people had provided themselves with provisions, which suddenly failed. But, in a desert, whence came the baskets they made use of in gathering up the remains of the entertainment? It is to be presumed, that they dropt down from heaven. But why not make loaves and fishes drop down also? It was undoubtedly requisite to feed this multitude during the three days march necessary for their return. But would it not have been a short way to have made the people feel neither hunger nor thirst? Would it not have been easier, by an effort of mercy, to have converted at once all the inhabitants of Judea, and spared Jesus the trouble of so many entertainments, flights, marches, and countermarches, which at last terminated in a manner so tragical to this hero of the romance?

The Pharisees and Sadducees did not lose sight of Jesus: on learning that he had returned to the interior of the

kingdom, they went in search of him. The evangelists, it is suspected, made them much worse than they were in reality, by representing them as eager to ruin them. Was it then so difficult to arrest thirteen men? Be that as it may, the Pharisees at this time accosted Jesus very politely, and demanded of him a miracle. "*You perform them*", said they, "*by dozens, in presence of a thousand people, who by your own confession, do not believe in you; give us then a specimen of your skill, and we shall be less opiniative than those of whom you complain. Do then show us this condescension.*" Jesus was inexorable, and perpetually referred them to Jonas. This refusal offended them: he, in turn, inveighed against them; and as the presence of these inconvenient spectators rendered his power useless, he quitted them in order to go to Bethsaida.

On the way, his apostles asked him the reason of his refusal to work a miracle in presence of persons who entreated him in so handsome a manner; on which Jesus, by a figure, gave them to understand that he could not operate before people so clear-sighted; "*Beware*", said he, "*of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod.*" Our silly folks, who had not time to provide bread, thought their master meant to reprove them for their negligence. Any other but Jesus would have laughed at the mistake, but the state of his affairs chagrined him, and he treated them very harshly.

On entering Bethsaida, they brought him a blind man whom he cured by applying spittle to his eyes. This remedy at first produced a pleasant effect: the man saw other men,

like trees, walking; Jesus then laid his hands on him, and immediately he saw quite otherwise.

But this miracle gained no conquest to the messiah. He, therefore, went to try his fortune in the villages in the environs of Caesarea-Philippi. It is in this journey that asking his apostles what they thought of him, some said that he passed for Elias, others for Jeremiah; but Peter openly confessed that he acknowledged him for the *Christ*: a confession which has since gained him the honor of supremacy in the sacred college, and of being declared the head of the church.

Though sovereign in heaven, Jesus possessed nothing on earth, and of course could confer no temporal gifts. Instead of these, he gave his disciples the spiritual privilege of damning and saving the rest of mankind at their pleasure. He promised to Peter the place of *door-keeper of Paradise*, since become so lucrative an office to his successors and assigns. Meanwhile Jesus recommended silence to the party on this promotion; but perhaps the traitor Judas, not satisfied with the office of treasurer, did not preserve the secret.

Notwithstanding the suffrage of Peter, the consequences which might result from the choler of the priests were always present to the mind of Jesus. Cried down and rejected, he presumed, with good sense, that, being once excluded from all the provinces, and the Gentiles not much inclined to receive for legislator a Jew, expelled his own country, he would be constrained sooner or later, to return to Jerusalem, where he must expect to meet with perilous

adventures. On the other hand, the Romans, masters of the forces over whom the Jews could arrogate no authority, would very quickly have put an end to the mission of a man whom they must have regarded either as a fool or as a disturber of the public peace, if he should have dared to declare against them. It is evident, indeed, that the mission of Jesus existed in Judea merely because the Romans were not much displeased that a restless and turbulent people should amuse themselves with following a man of his character—a pretended messiah, to whose appearance the prepossessions of the nation gave rise. Always certain of being able to crush those who dared to undertake the boldest enterprises, they troubled themselves little about what might be done in the country by a party no way formidable to an authority seconded by disciplined legions.

The situation of the Son of God must have alarmed his companions, however dull we may suppose them to have been. It was, therefore, necessary to devise means to encourage those at least who were the honest dupes of his vain promises. He did not dissemble the bad state of his affairs, the fate he had to dread, and the death with which he was menaced. He anticipated them on this subject, and declared that even if he should suffer death, they must not be discouraged, for at the end of three days he would rise triumphant from the tomb. We shall afterwards see the use the apostles made of this prediction, which must at the time have appeared to them as foolish as incredible.

To retain them as his followers, and revive their zeal, Jesus entertained them incessantly with the beauty of his Father's kingdom; but he told them that to arrive there, they

must have courage, love him sincerely, and consent to suffer with him. These melancholy sermons demonstrated the situation of the orator, and tended rather to depress than incite the courage of his auditory. He, therefore, thought it seasonable to present to his disciples a specimen of the glory which he had so often vaunted. For this purpose he exhibited the brilliant spectacle of the *transfiguration*. All the apostles were not witnesses of it: he granted this favor to three only, Peter, James, and John, his most intimate confidants, to whom he recommended silence. This scene took place, it is said, on mount Thabor. There Jesus appeared irradiated with glory, accompanied with two others, whom the apostles took for Moses and Elias, and whom, as far as we can discover, they had never seen before. A cloud unexpectedly enveloped the three luminous bodies; and when they no longer beheld any person, a voice was heard pronouncing these words, *This is my beloved Son*. The disciples were asleep while the spectacle was displayed—a circumstance which has occasioned a suspicion, that the whole was only a dream.

The apostles, who remained at the foot of the mountain, and had been deprived of this spectacle, wished to try their spiritual powers on a lunatic, or one possessed; but the devil disregarded their exorcisms. The father of the disordered person, perceiving their master descending from the mountain, immediately presented his son to him, whom Jesus cured; he then gave a strong reprimand to those *fumblers*, told them that their want of success was owing to want of faith, a grain of which was sufficient to remove mountains; and recommended to them fasting and prayer,

as the surest means of expelling certain demons more rebellious than others.

The people, however, withstood all these wonders: the devils, with whom *they* were possessed, could not be expelled by any thing which Jesus had not contrived. Expecting, therefore, to draw over some of the strangers whom the solemnities always brought in great numbers to the capital, he resolved, as the feast of the tabernacles was approaching, secretly to repair thither. But, agitated by the most troublesome misgivings, he traversed Gallilee; he explained himself on his fears in an enigmatical manner to his apostles, who could not comprehend what he said; but who, on observing their master grieved, conformed themselves to his humor.

On arriving at Capernaum, the place of his usual residence, the officers charged with collecting the customs taking him for a stranger, and not even recognising Matthew, their old companion exacted tribute from them. Jesus being a Jew, was offended at their demand; but whether they did not hearken to his reasons, or that he did not wish to be known, he dispatched Peter in search of a piece of thirty-pence in the mouth of a fish; or rather desired him go and catch a fish, which being sold for that sum, served to pay the custom.

The apostles having understood from the Saviour's discourses, that his kingdom was still very distant, occupied themselves with disputing on the pre-eminence and ranks they should enjoy in the empire which had been obscurely announced to them. In this they have been since faithfully

imitated by their successors. In the mean time Jesus took occasion from this dispute to deliver a sermon on humility. He called for a child, placed it in the midst of them, and declared that this child was the greatest among them. This sermon, by which our clergy have profitted so well, contains fine parables, and points out excellent means whereby to attain heaven, but not to thrive on earth. As all these, however, are only repetitions of what is taught in the sermon on the mount, we refer the reader to it.

Jesus wrought no miracles during his abode at Capernaum, where he had an interest not to be too much spoken of. His brethren or his parents, who were of the same mind as the priests, proceeded to that place on purpose to persuade him to leave his asylum and go into Judea, where he might exhibit his skill. They reminded him that the feast should draw him to Jerusalem, where he could not fail to find an opportunity of signalling himself.

This ironical tone enabled Jesus to foresee that they were plotting against him. Here eternal truth extricated itself from these importunities by means of falsehood. The Son of God told his brethren to go to the feast, but assured them that for himself he would *not* go. (John vii. 8.) This, however, did not hinder him from taking the road to Jerusalem, but with the greatest secresy. In his way he cured ten lepers, among whom one only, who was a Samaritan, shewed any gratitude to his physician; and from courtesy to his faith his sins were remitted. Notwithstanding this miracle and absolution, the incredulous do not admit that Jesus can be acquitted of having prevaricated. It seems very strange, that the Son of God, to whom his omnipotence

furnished so many honorable means of acting openly, had recourse to subtlety and deception in order to elude the snares of his enemies. This conduct can be explained only by supposing that what seems falsehood to carnal eyes is truth in the gospel.

CHAPTER XIV

JESUS SHOWS HIMSELF AT JERUSALEM – HE IS FORCED TO LEAVE IT – RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS – TRIUMPHANT ENTRY OF JESUS – HIS RETREAT TO THE GARDEN OF OLIVES – THE LORD'S SUPPER – HE IS ARRESTED

It is probable that our hero changed his intention of showing himself publicly at Jerusalem on learning the diversity of opinions which divided the capital on his account. He imagined that his presence and discourses would remedy the inconstancy of the people, and remove the perplexity of disputants; but he deceived himself. He who so often recommended the *cunning of serpents* failed on this occasion. But how revoke an immutable decree? **The world had been created solely on purpose that man might sin, and man had sinned in order that Jesus by his death might have the glory of making atonement for sinners.**

If they spoke much evil of Jesus in Jerusalem, they spoke also much good. Praise is a snare, wherein the Son of God himself was caught. Flattering himself with being able to reconcile the suffrages, he went to the temple and preached. But what must have been his surprise when on beginning to speak he heard the cries of rage, and the multitude accusing him of being possessed with a devil. In spite of the noise

that prevailed among the audience, Jesus continued to harangue. Perhaps he might have succeeded in conquering the bad disposition of the assembly, if a company of soldiers had not arrived, and interrupted him precisely in the most pathetic part of his sermon. He was speaking of his heavenly Father; and this occurrence has undoubtedly made us lose a sublime treatise on the nature of the divinity. The soldiers, however, had no design to seize him; they wished only to impose silence on him; it was, therefore, easy for him to steal away.

Jesus, whose temper appears to have been vindictive and restless, was piqued at the insult, and continued his invectives against the priests, doctors, and principal men among the Jews, who taking counsel on the subject, agreed to issue a decree against him and try him for contumacy; but Nicodemus, whom we mentioned before, undertook his defence, and proposed to his brethren to go and hear him before condemning him. They, however, insisted that no *good ever came out of Nazareth*, i.e. that his protegee could be no other than a vagabond.

In his retreat on the mount of Olives, Jesus learned that they had postponed proceedings against him. He therefore appeared next day in the temple by day break. The doctors and senators came a little later, and brought him a female accused of adultery—a crime for which, according to the law, she ought to suffer death. The doctors, perhaps acquainted with her conduct, and informed of Jesus' having women of wicked lives in his train, wanted to ensnare him. He might have got off by merely saying, that it was not for him to judge; but he wished to argue. He wrote on the

ground; and concluded, very prudently, that for one to judge it is necessary to be himself exempted from all sin. Then addressing himself to the doctors, *"let him among you who is without sin, cast the first stone at her."* At these words they departed, shrugging their shoulders. Jesus remained alone with the adulteress, whom the Jews would not have treated so tenderly if she had been really culpable. On this he said to her, *"Since no man hath accused thee, neither will I condemn thee: Go then, and sin no more."*

Having happily escaped from this danger, Jesus thought himself in safety; but, induced by his natural petulance, he again hazarded a sermon in the temple: he spoke only of himself; and what follows was nearly his strongest argument: *"You ask",* said he, *"a full proof by two witnesses. Now I bear witness of my Father, and my Father bears witness of me; you therefore ought to believe in me",* which amounts to this; *my Father proves me, and I prove my Father.* The doctors, but little surprised with this circuitous and erroneous reasoning, and with a view to come directly to the point, asked him, *"Who art thou?"* *"I am",* replied Jesus, *"from the beginning, and I have many things to say to you; but I speak to the world those things only which I have heard of my Father."* The audience were no doubt impatient at these ambiguous answers: Jesus, who wished to increase their embarrassment, then added that they would know him much better after they had put him to death.

The messiah did not omit to display great views in this conference: he informed his hearers in dark language, that it would not perhaps be impossible to shake off the Roman yoke. But either through fear, or that they did not believe

such a man in a condition to effect so great a revolution, they affected not to comprehend him. Piqued at finding the doctors and pharisees so dull and opiniative, he called them *children of the devil*; he affirmed that he was *older than Abraham*. In short, he broke out in a manner so unreasonable that the people, declaring against him, were about to stone him. Jesus, perceiving his folly when too late, concealed himself until an opportunity offered to escape.

From this time his miracles became more rare, and the zeal of the people subsided. It was therefore necessary to rekindle it: Jesus accordingly performed a miracle by curing a man born blind with a little earth moistened with spittle. This man was a well known mendicant, whom they could not suspect of any artifice. Yet they would no longer tolerate him after he had received his sight; an incident which no doubt diminished the alms he was in use to receive. But, perhaps, he was made a disciple. Some legends, indeed, assert, that after the death of Jesus he came into Gaul, where he became a bishop or inspector; which at least presupposes good organs of vision.

This prodigy coming to the knowledge of the Pharisees, the beggar underwent an examination; he openly confessed that one called Jesus had cured him with a clay of his composition and some bathings in Siloam. On this occasion, the bad humor of the pharisees went a little too far. They made it a crime for the physician to have composed his ointment on the Sabbath, and formed the project of excommunicating whoever should countenance him.

This resolution made Jesus tremble. He knew the power of excommunication among the Jews; he found himself

crossed in all his designs; and dared not venture to preach in Jerusalem, or show himself in any other place. Everything, even his miracles, turned against him, and it was not without some difficulty that he had escaped from the capital. At a little distance he knew of an asylum in Bethany, where his friend Lazarus possessed a house. He accordingly took the resolution of retiring thither; but though it was a large house, the party that accompanied him might have incommoded their host. This determined Jesus to send seventy of his disciples on a mission to Judea, to whom it appears he now gave very able powers; for on their return we find them applauding themselves, and overjoyed at the facility with which they expelled the devils.

Scarcely had Jesus arrived at Bethany, when in order to receive him in a becoming manner, they prepared a banquet. But the voluptuous Magdalane, content to devour with her eyes her dear Saviour, left Martha her sister to superintend the arrangements in the kitchen while she herself continued at his feet. Peevishness, and perhaps jealousy, got the better of Martha; she came and scolded Magdalane; but the tender messiah undertook the defence of his penitent, and asserted that she had chosen the better part. Brother Lazarus, who came in unexpectedly, terminated the squabble by ordering them to their work.

This little altercation was the cause why Jesus did not tarry long at Bethany. When about leaving it, a Pharisee through pure curiosity invited him to dinner. The messiah accepted his invitation; but our unpolished Jew had not the civility to give his guest water to wash with. This occasioned him a fine lecture on charity and filled with

marvellous comparisons, which, however, we shall omit, as our orator so frequently conned over the same lesson, and as this dinner appears to be a repetition of one we have already mentioned.

From this period till the feast of the dedication of the temple, our hero wandered in the environs of Jerusalem with his disciples, whom he incessantly entertained with the grandeur of his aerial kingdom, and what it was necessary to do in order to enter it. It was, according to Luke, on this occasion, and according to Matthew in the sermon on the mount, that he taught the apostles, who could not read, a short prayer called since that time the Lord's prayer, which (injurious as it is to the Divinity, whom it seems to accuse of leading us into temptation,) Christians still continue to repeat.

Meanwhile, time passed away without any advantage. The cessation of prodigies and preaching occasioned that of alms. Jesus again hazarded a sermon in a village; but although it attracted the admiration of the people, it produced no effect. Towards the end of our hero's mission we see the crowd no longer running after him. If he wished to perform a miracle, he was under the necessity of calling those he wished to cure. For eighteen years an old woman of this village had been quite bent. It was, according to the language of the country, the devil who had kept her in this inconvenient posture. Jesus called her and exclaimed, "*Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.*" The old woman made efforts to become straight; she approached the feet of the messiah with the pace of a tortoise; he laid his hands on her and immediately she walked upright like a girl of

fifteen. At this time the devil spoke not a word; on which it has been remarked that Satan always followed the opinion of the spectators of the Saviour's miracles, and marvelously coincided with them in acknowledging or rejecting him. This analogous conduct of the spectators and Satan was perhaps the result of the excommunication fulminated against all who regarded Jesus as the messiah.

The reputation of John Baptist still subsisted on the banks of the Jordan. To excite the primitive zeal, or, perhaps, with an intention to induce the disciples of John, who had borne him such flattering testimony, to follow him, Jesus turned towards that quarter. But the attempt was fruitless: he succeeded no better in curing a dropsical person that chanced to be in the house of a Pharisee who gave the Saviour a dinner. His cures were admired, but he spoiled all by his extravagant arguments, so offensive were they to the greatest part of his hearers. As a last resource, he endeavored to attach publicans, officers, and such like disreputable persons to his party; but these were only feeble props, and their familiarity made him lose the little esteem which others still entertained for him.

The sight of punishment has often occasioned the loss of courage even to the most determined hero. Ours, agitated by a crowd of untoward events, imagined that nothing being dearer to men than life, and nothing more difficult than to come back after leaving it, the people of Jerusalem, notwithstanding the clamors of the priests, would declare in his favor if he could succeed in making them believe that he had the power of raising the dead. Lazarus the intimate friend of Jesus appeared to him the fittest person for

presenting to the public the spectacle of a dead man brought to life. When everything was properly concerted, Jesus set out for Bethany. Learning this, Martha and Magdalane went to meet him, and publicly informed him that their brother was very sick. Jesus made them no answer, but speaking loud so as to be heard, "*This sickness*", said he, "*is not unto death, but for the glory of God.*" This was already telling too much.

Instead of going to Bethany, Jesus remained two days in the village without doing anything; thereafter he told his apostles that it was necessary to return into Judea. He was there at the time he spoke, but he meant, no doubt, the capital. They represented that it would be a very imprudent journey as the populace had recently wanted to stone him. We see that Jesus said this on purpose to give room to his friends to invite him not to neglect brother Lazarus in his sickness. Besides, the following words evince that he had no intention of going to Jerusalem. "*Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep.*" On hearing this, the apostles thought Lazarus had recovered. Jesus declared that he was dead, and that he was highly pleased with not having been present at his decease, as it would afford means to confirm them in the faith.

The two days which Jesus passed in the village, joined to the time he took in going about half a league, were immediately converted into four days from the period he pretended Lazarus was dead. At last he arrived at the abode of the defunct, whom they had deposited in a vault adjoining to his house, and not, according to the custom of those days, in a sepulchre out of the city. After some

questions put to Martha on her belief, he assured her that her brother would rise again. "Yes", said she, "*but it will be at the last day.*" Here our Thaumaturge affected to be very sensibly touched; he trembled, he wept, invoked the aid of heaven, advanced to the vault, made it be opened, called on Lazarus with a loud voice, and commanded him to come forth. The dead man, though wrapped up in his grave clothes, arose and was unloosed before witnesses at the entrance of the vault.

This prodigy was conducted with very little dexterity. John, the only Evangelist who relates this striking miracle, in vain supports his relation with the presence of the Jews: he destroys his own work by not making them come till after the death of Lazarus to console his sisters. It was necessary that the Jews should have seen him die, dead, and embalmed; that they should have felt the smell of his corruption; and that they should have conversed with him after his coming out of the tomb. Unbelievers have exhausted all the darts of criticism on this miracle. To investigate it would be only repeating what they have said. The Jews found in it such strong marks of knavery, that far from being converted, they took more serious measures against Jesus, who having intimation of this, withdrew towards the desert to a city called *Ephrem*, where he abode with his disciples. In the mean time the cities and villages were ordered to refuse him an asylum, and the inhabitants to deliver him up to the magistrates. In fact this miracle occasioned a general proscription of the messiah. On presenting himself at the gates of a town in Samaria, they at first refused to let him pass; he was not permitted to stop at

Jericho, though he gave sight to a blind man, whom Matthew magnifies into two. Jesus returned to Bethany, where he was received, not by Lazarus, who had, perhaps, been obliged to save himself on account of his being concerned in such an imposture; but, as Matthew affirms, by Simon the leper. Lazarus after his resurrection appeared no longer on the stage.

A legend, according to Baronius, affirms that Lazarus went afterwards to preach the faith to the Provençals, and was the first bishop of Marseilles. As for Magdalane, she went to bewail her sins and the death of her lover in a desert of Province, called *la Sainte Baume* (the Holy Balm). Martha, as everybody knows, lies interred at Tarascon.

This rejection and desertion of Jesus threw the apostles into consternation. To reanimate their confidence, Jesus caused a fig-tree to die in twenty-four hours to punish it for not producing figs at a season when it was physically impossible for it to bear any; that is about the month of March. As all the actions of the messiah, even when they appear foolish to ordinary men, have an important signification in the eyes of devotees illuminated by faith, we ought to perceive in the miracle of this fig-tree one of the fundamental dogmas of the Christian religion symbolically represented. The fig-tree cursed is the mass of mankind, whom, according to our theologians, the God of mercy curses and condemns to eternal flames for having neither faith nor grace, which they could not possibly acquire of themselves, and which God does not seem to have been willing to give them. Thus, we find that the ridiculous

passage of the fig-tree in the gospel is intended to typify one of the most profound dogmas of the Christian religion.

Whilst Jesus in this manner instructed his apostles by figures and ingenious parables, his enemies were laboring hard against him at Jerusalem. It appears that the Sanhedrim was divided on his account. They perhaps wished to punish him, but not to put him to death. All were of opinion that he should be arrested without noise, and that they should afterwards consider on the punishment to be inflicted. The most fiery of the priests wished that he should be seized in the capital, and assassinated during the hurry of the festival. This shows they did not consider themselves certain that the people would not interest themselves in his behalf. Perhaps they had some reason: what a part of the populace did in his favor when he approached Jerusalem, evinced that it would have been very dangerous to act openly. In pursuance of this plan, they secretly promised a reward to whoever should deliver up Jesus; and we shall soon find one of his apostles betraying his master for a very trifling sum.

Before entering Jerusalem, Jesus evidently caused his approach to be announced by his friends in that city. His adherents labored to render his entry into the capital somewhat brilliant. Affecting to display modesty in the midst of his triumph, or unable to do better, Jesus chose for his steed a young ass that had never been rode on, which his disciples, by his order, had seized with its mother. In place of a saddle, some of the disciples laid their clothes on the back of the ass. The company advanced in good order. The people, ever fond of a spectacle, ran to see this; and we

may believe that if some at this time paid sincere homage to the triumpher, the greatest number laughed at him and shouted at the ridiculous farce. The chief magistrate fearing an uproar, endeavored to quiet the populace, to whom the disciples had set the example. He accordingly addressed Jesus himself, who answered that "the stones would speak, rather than his friends would be silent." This seemed to insinuate an insurrection in case they should attempt force; and the magistrate understood very well that this was not the moment to provoke Jesus.

As soon as the Messiah had entered Jerusalem, he betook himself to weeping and predicting its ruin. The announcing calamities was, and will ever be, a sure method to excite the attention of the vulgar. Some persons of consequence who knew not the cause of the riotous assemblies of the people around Jesus, on enquiry were answered, it is Jesus of Nazareth—it is a prophet of Galilee. Mark assures us, that in this transaction, decisive in behalf of the Son of God, Jesus once more gave to the people the pillage of the merchandise exposed to sale in the court before the porch of the temple. This is very credible: it was indeed more necessary at present than at the former period.

Profiting by the tumult, Jesus cured a great many blind and lame people. Whilst these wonders were performing on one side, they exclaimed Hosanna on the other. Some besought the author of these exclamations and tumult to stop them; but the messiah had no longer measures to observe, he perceived it was necessary to engage the popular enthusiasm, and that it would be silly to appease it. Besides, the uncertainty of success had thrown him into

distress, which hindered him from seeing or understanding anything. A child, frightened, or too much pressed in the crowd, began to cry while Jesus was speaking, "*Father, save me from this hour.*" They took the child's voice for a voice from heaven. John, moreover, informs us, that the disciples had palmed on the people the famous miracle of Lazarus' resurrection, which, attested by eye-witnesses, must have made a great impression on the astonished vulgar. They did not entertain a doubt that the voice from heaven which they had heard, was that of an angel who bore testimony to Jesus; and the latter, profiting dexterously of the occasion, said to them, "*This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes.*" He afterwards harangued the people, and announced himself as "*the Christ*", but he spoiled his sermon by timid expressions, and not knowing how to draw from the circumstance all the advantage it seemed to promise, he left the city and retired to Bethany, where he passed the night with his disciples.

In general, our hero was subject to low spirits:—we constantly find in him a mixture of audacity and pusillanimity. Accustomed to operate in the country, and among rude and ignorant people, he did not know how to conduct himself in a city, or to succeed among vigilant and intelligent enemies. Thus he lost the fruit of his memorable journey, which had been so long before projected. We do not indeed find that after this he returned to Jerusalem, except to be tried. Melancholy and fear had deprived him of all presence of mind, and his disciples were under the necessity of reminding him that it was time to take the passover. They asked him where he wished them to go and

prepare the entertainment: He bade them take the first house they met with, which they did. A chamber was provided for them where they assembled with their master, who, ever occupied with his sorrowful thoughts, gave them to understand that this Passover would likely be the last which he should celebrate. His language was mournful; he bathed their feet in order to teach them that humility was essentially necessary when they were weakest. Having afterwards set down to table, he told them that he was afraid of being betrayed by one of themselves. His suspicions fell on Judas, whose frequent visits to the houses of the priests might be known to his master. As Judas was treasurer to the party, and charged with paying for the entertainment, Jesus wished it to be understood that they were then regaled at the expense of his life and his blood. "*Take*", said he to them in a figurative style, "*for this is my body.*" Thereafter he gave them the cup, saying that it was "his blood which was to be shed for them." Judas readily comprehending the meaning of his enigma, arose from table, and immediately withdrew: but the other apostles did not understand it.—It is, however, on this emblem that some doctors have since built the famous dogma of *transubstantiation*: they enjoin rational beings to believe, that *at the word of a priest bread is changed into the real body, and wine into the real blood of Jesus!* They have taken the figurative words of our missionary literally, and have employed them in forming a *mystery*, or rather the most curious juggle that ever has been devised by priests in order to deceive mankind.

After supper our guests retired with their master to the mount of Olives, where they thought themselves in safety;

but our hero did not entertain the same opinion. Scarcely had the Man-God entered the garden of Olives when a mortal terror seized him; he wept like a child and anticipated the pangs of death. His apostles, more tranquil, yielded to sleep, and Jesus, who was afraid of being surprised, mildly reproached them. "*Could you not*", said he, "*watch with me one hour?*" Judas, whom we have seen depart suddenly and who had not rejoined the party, gave extreme uneasiness to Jesus and every moment redoubled his terror. It is affirmed that an angel came to strengthen him in his situation: Yet he was afterwards seized with a bloody sweat, which can only denote a very great weakness.

The agitated condition of the Saviour appears very surprising to persons in whose minds faith has not removed every difficulty the gospel presents. They are much astonished to find such weakness in a God who knew from all eternity that he was destined to die for the redemption of the human race. They aver that God his father, without exposing his son to such cruel torments, might by one word have pardoned guilty men, and conformed them to his views. They think that the conduct of God would have been more generous in appeasing his wrath at less expense on account of an apple eat four thousand years ago. But the ways of God are not as those of men. The Deity ought never to act in a *natural* way, or be easily understood. It is the essence of religion that men should not comprehend any part of the divine conduct. This furnishes to their spiritual guides the pleasure of explaining it to them for their money.

On the near approach of death the Man-God showed a weakness which many ordinary men would blush to

display in a similar situation. The traitor Judas, at the head of a company of archers or soldiers, proceeded towards Jesus whose retreats he knew. A kiss was the signal by which the guards were to recognise the person whom they had orders to seize. Already Jesus beheld the lanterns advancing which lighted the march of these sbirri; and perceiving the impossibility of escaping, he made a virtue of necessity. Like a coward become desperate, he resolutely presented himself to the party: "*whom seek ye?*" said he, with a firm tone: — "*Jesus*", answered they. "*I am he.*" Here Judas confirmed with a kiss this heroical confession. The apostles, awakened by the noise, came to the succour of their master. Peter, the most zealous among them, cut off with a stroke of his sabre the ear of Malchus, servant of the High Priest. Jesus, convinced of the folly of resistance, commanded him to put up his sword, set in order the ear of Malchus, (who escaped at the expense of being frightened,) and then surrendered himself.

It is said that the party who came to apprehend Jesus, were forced at first to give way. The fact is very probable: it was dark, and the archers perceiving the apostles but very indistinctly, might believe that their enemies were more numerous than they were; but plucking up courage they fulfilled their commission. Whilst they bound the Son of God with cords, he besought the chief of the detachment not to molest his apostles, and as they wanted him only, he easily obtained his request. John believes that Jesus made this entreaty in order to fulfil a prophecy; but it appears our hero thought it was neither useful nor just to involve men in his ruin, whose assistance might still be necessary, or who,

being at large, would have a better opportunity to act in his favor.

CHAPTER XV

TRIAL AND CONDEMNATION OF JESUS – HIS PUNISHMENT AND DEATH

When the enemies of Jesus saw him in their hands, they were not less embarrassed than before. From the time the Romans had subdued the Jewish nation, they had no longer the power of the sword. To punish those who had sinned against religion, it was sufficient at any former period, that the high priest pronounced sentence on the culprit. The Romans, more tolerant, rarely punished with death; and, besides, to take away life, they required decisive proofs against the accused. Annanias, father-in-law of the high priest Caiphas, was known among the Jews for a very subtle man. It was to Annanias' house, therefore, that they first conducted Jesus. We are ignorant of what passed in this first scene of the bloody tragedy. It is to be presumed, that the prisoner underwent an examination which proved no way favorable to him.

From the house of Annanias they conducted Jesus to that of Caiphas. He was the man most interested by his office in the ruin of every innovator in matters of religion; yet we do not find this pontiff speaking with anger: he conducted himself according to law, and as a man who understood his profession. "*Who*", said he to Jesus, "*are your disciples, their number and names?*" Jesus made no answer. "*But at least*", continued Caiphas, "*explain to me your doctrine. What end does it propose? You must have a system. Tell us then what it is.*"

At last the messiah condescended to say, "*I spoke openly to the world; it is not I, but those who have heard me, that ought to be interrogated.*" Here one of the officers of the high priest gave Jesus a blow on the ear, saying, "*Answerest thou the high priest so!*" The reprimand was harsh, but it must be owned, that the answer of Jesus was disrespectful to a man invested with authority, and with the right of putting questions, in order to discover the truth from the mouth of the accused. Jesus ought to have been better acquainted with his own doctrine than the peasants of Galilee or Judea, before whom he had through preference affected to preach in an unintelligible manner. It was therefore just and natural to suppose, that Jesus could give a better account of his sentiments and parables, than an ignorant multitude who had listened without being able to comprehend him. He alone could be supposed to possess the secret of forming into a system the scattered and unconnected principles of his heavenly doctrine.

Caiphas, unable to draw anything from the accused, waited till next morning, when the council would assemble in order to continue the inquest. Jesus appeared before the Sanhedrim, the most respectable tribunal in the nation. The gospel represents the priests and chiefs of the Jews occupied during the whole night that Jesus was arrested, in searching for and suborning *false witnesses* against him. They produced two persons, on whom they very unjustly bestowed this epithet. These witnesses deposed to a fact verified by the gospel itself. – "*We heard him say that he would destroy the temple, and rebuild it in three days.*" It is certain that Jesus had uttered these words, "*Destroy this temple, and in*

three days I will raise it up." But the poor witnesses knew not that he then spoke in his figurative style. Their mistake was pardonable, for, according to the gospel, the apostles themselves did not discover the true sense of these words till after the resurrection of their master.

This evidence was not sufficient to condemn Jesus. The Jews, however iniquitous we may suppose them to have been, did not sentence fools to die; and these words of their prisoner must have appeared to them the effect of delirium. Accordingly the high priest contented himself with asking what he had to answer? and as the accused refused to speak, he did not further insist on that point. He proceeded to questions more serious: "*Are you the Christ?*" said he to Jesus. How did the messiah answer this question? "*If I tell it, you will not believe me, nor suffer me to depart. But hereafter the Son of man shall sit on the right hand of God.*" "*You are then the Son of God?*" continued the priest. "*You have said it*", replied the accused. "*But it is not sufficient that we should say it; it is you who are to answer: once more, are you the Christ? I conjure you by the living God tell us if you are his Son?*" – "*You have said it*", answered Jesus: "*the Son of man shall one day come in the clouds of heaven.*" Notwithstanding these perplexing answers, the judges imagined they understood the meaning of his words: they plainly perceived that he wished to give himself out for *the Son of God*. "*He hath spoken blasphemy*", said they; and immediately concluded that he deserved death—a judgment which was valid according to the law of the Jews, and which must also appear so to Christians whose sanguinary laws punish capitally those whom the clergy accuse of blasphemy. They have, therefore, no right

to blame the conduct of the Jews, so often imitated by ecclesiastical and secular tribunals.

On the other hand, if it was necessary that Jesus should die; if he wished it; if the reprobation of the Jews was resolved on, he acted very properly in keeping them in error. But if this was the intention of providence, why preach to them? Why perform miracles before a whole people whilst a small number were only to profit by it? Did Jesus wish to save them? In that case why not convince the whole Sanhedrim of his power? Why did he not burst his bonds? Why did he not by a single word change their obstinate hearts? Did he wish to destroy them? Why not then strike them dead? Why not instantly precipitate them into hell?

The judges could not comprehend why the accused, who could not extricate himself from their hands, could be the Son of God. They accordingly declared him worthy of death; but not definitely, as it was requisite that the sentence should be approved of and executed by the Romans, sovereigns of the nation. During these transactions, Jesus was treated in the cruelest manner by the Jews, whom, as well as Christians, their zeal permitted, or rather enjoined, to be savage.

It is during this night, and the morning of the following day, so fatal to the Saviour of the world, that we must place the three denials of Peter, the chief of the apostles. His master had prayed for him. His comrades, seized with dismay, had dispersed themselves in Jerusalem and its neighborhood. Several among them would have acted like

Peter if they had found themselves in a similar situation. He had at least the merit of keeping near his master; he abjured him, it is true; but would it have been of more avail if, by acknowledging him openly, he should have entangled himself in a very awkward affair, without being able to relieve the Saviour.

The Sanhedrim repaired to the palace of Pilate the Roman governor, in order to get the sentence confirmed. Jesus was conducted thither. Pilate instantly perceived that it was an affair in which fanaticism and folly had the greatest share. Filled with contempt for so ridiculous a motive, he was at first unwilling to interfere. *Judge him yourselves*, said he to the magistrates. On this the latter became false witnesses. Zeal, no doubt, made them imagine that every thing was allowable against an enemy of religion. They interested the sovereign power in their quarrel—They accused Jesus of wishing "*to make himself king of the Jews*", and of having maintained, that "*they ought not to pay tribute to Casar.*" We recognize here the genius of the clergy, who, to ruin their enemies, are never very fastidious in the choice of means. They especially strive to render the latter suspected by the temporal power, in order to engage it, through motives of self-interest, to satiate their revenge.

Pilate could not avoid paying attention to accusations of so serious a nature. Unable to persuade himself that the man he beheld could have conceived projects so ridiculous, he interrogated him:— "*Are you the king of the Jews?*" On which Jesus demanded of Pilate— "*Say you this of yourself, or have others told it you?*" — "*Of what consequence is it to me*", returned Pilate, "*that you pretend to be the king of the Jews?*"

You do not appear a man much to be dreaded by the Emperor my master – I am not of your nation; I concern myself very little with your silly quarrels. Your priests are your accusers – I have my own opinion of them – but they accuse you; they deliver you into my hands – Tell me then, what have you done?" Jesus might very easily have got off; but in his distress his judgment failed; and, far from penetrating the favorable disposition of Pilate, who wished to save him, he replied, *"that his kingdom was not of this world – that he was the truth"*. On this the Governor asked him, *"What is the truth?"* But the Saviour made no reply, though the question well deserved a categorical answer.

Pilate, a little alarmed on account of Jesus, declared, that he *"found nothing in him worthy of death."* But this redoubled the cries of his enemies. Having learned that the accused was a Galilean, he, to get quit of the ridiculous business, seized the opportunity to send him to Herod, to whose tetrarchate Jesus originally belonged. We have said elsewhere that this prince had desired to see our hero, and his desire was now gratified. But on perceiving his obstinacy and constant refusal to answer the questions put to him, he conceived a sovereign contempt for him. To Pilate therefore he sent him back clothed in a white robe by way of derision. The governor, however, saw no capital crime in Jesus, and wished to save him; besides, his superstitious wife had a dream, that interested her in favor of our missionary. Pilate then said to the Jews, that he could find nothing in the man which rendered him worthy of death. But the people misled, and wishing him to be crucified, cried out *Tolle, Tolle; away, away with him.* The

Governor now devised another plan to save him. "*I release*", said he, "*every year a criminal; supposing that Jesus may be culpable, I am going to set him free.*" The cries were redoubled, and the Jews demanded, that a robber called Barabbas should profit of this mercy in preference to Jesus, whose punishment they persisted to urge.

The Romans, desirous to calm the rage of a fanatical people, caused Jesus to be whipped; dressed him in a ridiculous manner, crowned him with thorns, and made him hold a reed instead of a sceptre. Thus decorated, Pilate showed him to the people, saying, "*Behold your king! are you not yet satisfied? See how to please you I have bedecked him. Be then less cruel: do not carry your indignation further; he ought no longer to give you umbrage.*"

The priests, whose maxim it is "*never to forgive*", were not moved by this spectacle; nothing short of the death of their enemy could satisfy them. They changed their ground, and, to intimidate the governor, told him that by suffering the accused to live he betrayed the interests of his master. It was then that Pilate, fearing the effects of the malice of the clergy, consigned Jesus to the Jews, that they might satiate their rage on him; declaring, however, that "*he washed his hands of it*", and that it was against his opinion if they put him to death. We cannot well conceive how a Roman governor, who exercised sovereign power in Judea, could yield so easily to the wishes of the Jews: but we cannot more easily conceive how God permitted this honest governor to become an accomplice in the death of his dear Son.

Jesus, abandoned to the rage of devotees, again suffered the cruellest treatment. Pilate, to humble those barbarians,

wished the label affixed to the upper part of the cross to bear, that he was their king; and nothing could induce him to recede from this resolution. "*What is written is written*", said he to those who requested him to alter an inscription dishonorable to their nation. It is also proper to observe, that this inscription is differently expressed by the four evangelists.

The Jews treated Jesus as a dethroned king, and made him experience the most bloody outrages. Though he had said that he could make *legions of angels* come to his protection, yet the Jews, notwithstanding their natural credulity, paid no credit to his assertion, and nothing could stop their religious cruelty, excited by the priests. They made him take the road to Calvary. He sunk under the weight of his cross, but they loaded Simon with it, who was more vigorous. The unfortunate Jesus must have been indeed much enfeebled by what he had suffered during both the night and the morning. At last he was placed on the cross, the usual punishment of slaves. He did not suffer long under the agonies of crucifixion: after invoking his Father, and lamenting his being so shamefully abandoned, he expired, it is said, between two thieves. It is said that Jesus when dying exclaimed, "*Eli! Eli! lamma sabbactani!*" (*My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me!*) This complaint was very ridiculous in the mouth of Jesus, if, as is pretended, the part he acted was agreed on with his father from all eternity. Matthew and Mark tells us, that *both* the thieves insulted him with abusive language; while Luke assures us, that *one* only of the two abused the Saviour, and that the other reprimanded his comrade for his insolence,

and besought Jesus "*to remember him when he should come to his kingdom.*" But our interpreters have a thousand ways of proving that the Holy Spirit never contradicts himself, even when he speaks in the most contradictory manner. Those who have faith are satisfied with their arguments, but they do not so powerfully impress freethinkers, who have the misfortune to reason.

The remorse of Judas soon revenged Jesus on this traitor. He restored to the priests the thirty pieces he had received from them, and went forthwith to *hang* himself. This is what Matthew says, in opposition to the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, (Luke) who tells us, that Judas "*purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong he burst asunder in the midst.*" Mark and John are silent respecting this memorable event. According to Matthew, the selling of Jesus for thirty pieces had been foretold by Jeremiah. The prediction, however, does not appear in the writings of this prophet, which would create a suspicion that the evangelists, little satisfied with applying to Jesus some prophecies, such as are extant in the Old Testament, have drawn from their own store, or forged them when in need. But our able interpreters are not at all embarrassed with this; and a holy blindness will always prevent these trifles from being perceived.

The gospel informs us, that at the death of Jesus all Nature seemed to take part in the grand event. At the moment he expired there was a total eclipse; a frightful shaking of the earth was felt, and several holy personages came out of their tombs to take a walk on the streets of Jerusalem. The Jews alone had the misfortune to see nothing

of all this; it appears, that these wonders were performed only in the fancy of the disciples of Jesus. As for the eclipse, it was, doubtless, an inconceivable prodigy which could not have taken place without a total derangement in the machine of the world. A total eclipse of the sun during full moon, the time at which the celebration of the passover was fixed by the Jews, is of all miracles the most impossible. No contemporary author has mentioned it, though this phenomenon well merited to be transmitted to posterity. The incredulous therefore maintain, that there was no other eclipse on this occasion but of the common sense of those who saw all these marvels, or of the good faith of the writers who have attested them. With respect to the shaking of the earth, they suspect that the apostles of Jesus, agitated with fear at the sight of their divine master's fate, were the only persons who felt it. In this way indeed the thing becomes very probable. If the punishment of Jesus is proved by the gospel, some circumstances may create a doubt whether he died immediately. We are told, that they did not, according to custom, break his legs. His friends had the liberty of taking away his body, and they might dress his wounds on finding that he was not dead, and in this manner bring him back to life, at least for some time.

When Jesus was dead, or believed to be so, after an incision had been made in his side, from which came blood and a whitish fluid, which they took for water, his body was embalmed and deposited in a new tomb. This was done on Friday evening. He had several times intimated that he would rise again the third day; that is, at the end of three days and three nights. Yet on the Sunday following, early in

the morning, the tomb wherein he had been laid was found empty. The Jews, always opiniative, did not admit that he was risen again. They held it more natural to believe that he had failed in his word; or to suppose that his disciples had carried him off. This could easily have been executed by force; by bribing the guards, whom the priests and Pharisees had placed around his sepulchre; or by cunning. As Pilate felt but little interest in the matter, he appears not to have punished the guards for neglecting to take care of what he had confided to them. The idolatrous governor, little acquainted with the resources or designs of the apostles, never suspected they could persuade any person, that a man, whose death was well attested, could return to life. It is not surprising that a Pagan should doubt the resurrection of Jesus; from the first day of the church, several Christians have not believed it, perceiving the incongruity of supposing that the Son of God could die. They have therefore denied the death of their divine master. The followers of Basilides affirmed that Jesus at the time of his passion assumed the appearance of Simon the Cyrenean, and transferred to him his own, under which the said Simon was crucified in his stead, while Jesus, who beheld this without being himself seen, laughed at their mistake. The Cerinthians, or disciples of Cerinthus, who was contemporary with the apostles; and the Carpocratians likewise denied that Jesus could have been actually crucified. Some have maintained, that the traitor Judas was punished in place of his master. These sectaries regarded Jesus as a mere man, and not as a god. Thus we find Christians contemporary with the apostles believing in Jesus and yet doubting

his death. It was, however, on this marvellous notion, as we shall see, that a sect was afterwards founded, powerful enough to subject by degrees the Roman empire and a considerable portion of the globe.

The punishment of our hero must have produced very little sensation in the world, and his adventures must have been strangely unknown, since we do not find that any historian, with the exception of the evangelists, makes mention of them. In the year 1263, a conference was held in presence of Don Jaques king of Arragon, and the queen his wife, between the Rabbin Zechial, and the Dominican, Friar Paul, called Cyraic. This conference is very memorable. The two champions were well versed in the Hebrew and in antiquity. The *Talmud*, the *Targum*, the archives of the Sanhedrim were on the table. The contested passages were explained into Spanish. Zechiel maintained, that Jesus had been condemned under the king Alexander Jannaeus, (and not under Herod the Tetrarch,) agreeably to what is related in the *Toldos Jaschut*, and in the *Talmud*. "*Your gospels*", said he, "*were not written till towards the beginning of your second century, and are not authentic like our Talmud. We could not crucify him you speak of in the time of Herod the Tetrarch, since we had not the power of life and death in our hands. We could not have crucified him, because that manner of punishment was not in use among us. Our Talmud has it, that he who perished in the time of Jannaeus was condemned to be stoned to death. We can no more believe your gospels than those pretended 'Letters of Pilate', which you have forged.*" — *Letters on Eminent Writers*, p. 123. The illustrious and profound *Freret*, perpetual Secretary to the Academy of Belles Lettres at Paris, had no hesitation in

avowing that after the closest investigation he was clearly of opinion, the account given in the *Talmud* respecting Jesus was the correct one. This opinion he supported by showing, that the gospels were not written till upwards of 40 years after the period fixed for the death of Jesus; that they were composed in foreign languages, at places distant from Jerusalem, which were full of the disciples of John, called Therapeutae; of Judaïtes, and of Galileans, all of whom had their gospels differing from each other, which they insisted were genuine; that the four gospels now held canonical, were the last written; that there is incontestible proof of this fact arising from the circumstance, that the first fathers of the church often quote passages which are to be found only in the gospel of the Egyptians or in that of St. James; and that Justin is the first who expressly quoted the received gospels. Justin was not born till a century after the commencement of our vulgar era.

CHAPTER XVI

RESURRECTION OF JESUS – HIS CONDUCT UNTIL HIS ASCENSION – EXAMINATION OF THE PROOFS OF THE RESURRECTION

The history of the life of an ordinary man terminates commonly with his death; but it is different with a Man-God who has the power of raising himself from the dead, or whom his adherents have the faculty of making rise at will. This happened to Jesus; thanks to his apostles or evangelists, we see him still playing a considerable part even after his decease. The moment he was arrested, the disciples of Jesus, as we have seen, dispersed themselves

into Jerusalem and the neighborhood, with the exception of Simon Peter, who did not lose sight of him during his examination at the house of the high priest. This apostle was anxious, for his own sake, to know the result of it. Encouraging themselves on finding that Jesus had not criminated them in his examinations, the disciples reassembled, concerted measures and determined, as their master was dead, or reputed so, to take advantage of the notions which he had diffused during his mission. Accustomed for so long a period to lead a wandering life under his command, and subsist at the expense of the public by preaching, exorcisms and miracles, they resolved to continue a profession more easily exercised, and incomparably more lucrative than their original occupations. They had enjoyed an opportunity of observing that it was better to catch men than fish. But how could the disciples of a man who was punished as an impostor, make themselves be listened to? It was necessary to give out that their master during his life having raised others from the dead, had, after his own death, raised himself in virtue of his omnipotence. Jesus had predicted it; it was therefore necessary to accomplish the prediction. The honor of the master and his disciples thereby acquired a new lustre; and the sect, far from seeing itself annihilated or disgraced, was enabled to acquire new partizans in this credulous nation.

In consequence of this reasoning, the apostles had only to make the body of their master, dead or alive, to disappear; whereas if it had remained in the tomb, it would have borne evidence against them. They did not even wait till the three days and three nights in the pretended prophecy were

expired. The dead body disappeared on the second day; and thus the second day after his decease, our hero, triumphing over hell and the grave, found himself revived.

If Jesus did not die of his punishment, his resurrection had nothing surprising in it. If he was actually dead, the cave where his body was deposited, might have secret passages, through which they could enter and return without being observed, or stopped by the enormous stone with which they had affected to block up its entrance, and near which the guards had been placed. Thus the dead body might have been carried off either by force or by stratagem; and, perhaps, it had never been deposited in the tomb at all. In whatever manner the affair was transacted, a report was circulated that Jesus was risen and his body not to be found.

Nothing is of more importance to a Christian than to ascertain satisfactorily the resurrection of Jesus. Paul tells us that "*if Jesus be not risen, our hope is vain.*" Indeed without this miracle of Omnipotence, intended to manifest the superiority of Jesus over other men, and the interest Deity took in his success, he must appear only as an adventurer or weak fanatic, punished for having given umbrage to the priests of his country. It is therefore requisite to examine seriously a fact on which alone the belief of every Christian is founded. In doing this it is necessary to satisfy ourselves of the quality of the witnesses who attest the fact; whether they were acute, disinterested, intelligent persons; and if they agree in their narratives. These precautions are the more necessary, when it is intended to examine *supernatural* facts, which, to be believed, require much stronger proofs than ordinary facts. On the unanimous testimony of some

historians, we readily believe that Casar made himself master of Gaul. The circumstances of his conquest would be less established were we to find them related by himself only, or his adherents; but they would appear incredible, if we found in them prodigies or facts contrary to the order of nature. We should then have reason to believe that it was intended to impose on us; or, if we judged more favorably of the authors, we would regard them as enthusiasts and fools.

Agreeably to these principles of sound criticism, let us consider who are the witnesses that attest the marvellous, and, consequently, the least probable fact which history can produce. They are apostles—But who are these apostles? they are adherents of Jesus. Were these apostles *enlightened* men? Everything proves that they were ignorant and rude, and that an indefatigable credulity was the most prominent trait in their character. Did they behold Jesus rising from the dead?—No:—no one beheld this great miracle. The apostles themselves did not see their master coming out of the grave; they merely found that his tomb was empty; which by no means proves that he had risen. It will, however, be said, that the apostles saw him afterwards and conversed with him, and that he showed himself to some women who knew him very well. But these apostles and these women, did they see distinctly? Did not their prepossessed imaginations make them see what did not exist? Is it absolutely certain that their master was dead before they laid him in the tomb?

In the *second* place, were these witnesses *disinterested*? The apostles and disciples of Jesus were, doubtless interested in the glory of their master. Their interests were

closely connected with those of a man who enabled them to subsist without toil. Several among them expected to be recompensed for their attachment, by the favors which he promised to bestow on them in the kingdom he was about to establish. Finding these hopes destroyed by the death, real or supposed, of their chief, most of the apostles, persuaded that all was over, lost courage; but, others, less daunted, conceived that it was not necessary to give up all hope, but that they might still profit by the impressions which the preaching and wonders of Jesus had made on the people. They believed that their master might again return, or, if they supposed him dead, they could assert that he had foretold he would rise again. They therefore agreed to circulate the report of his resurrection, and to say that they had seen him after he had triumphantly come out of the tomb. This would appear very credible in the case of a personage who had proved himself capable of raising others from the dead. Knowing the imbecility of those they had to deal with, they presumed that the people were prepared long beforehand to believe the marvellous wonder which they intended to announce. They conceived that it was necessary in order to subsist, to continue preaching doctrines which would not attract an audience if it had not been taken for granted that their author was risen again. They felt that it was necessary to preach the resurrection of Jesus, or perish with hunger. They foresaw, moreover, that it was requisite to brave chastisement and even death, rather than renounce an opinion on which their daily subsistence and welfare absolutely depended. Hence unbelievers conclude, that the witnesses of the resurrection

were anything but disinterested, and were spurred on by the principle, that *he who risks nothing, gains nothing*.

In the *third* place, are the witnesses of the resurrection unanimous in their evidence? Much more, are they consistent with themselves in their narratives? We find neither the one nor the other. Though Jesus, according to some of the evangelists, had foretold in the most positive manner, that he would rise again, John makes no mention of this prediction, but expressly declares, that the disciples of Jesus knew not that he must rise again from the dead. This denotes in them a total ignorance of that great event, said, however, to have been announced by their master; and creates a suspicion that these predictions were piously invented afterwards. Yet nothing can be more positive than the manner in which Matthew speaks of the prediction: he supposes it so well known to the public, that he affirms the priests and pharisees went to Pilate and told him, "*We remember this deceiver said while he was yet alive, that after three days he would rise again.*" We do not, however, find in any of the evangelists a passage where this resurrection is foretold in so public and decided a manner. Matthew himself relates only the answer of Jesus to those who demanded a sign; it consisted, as we have elsewhere remarked, in referring them to "*Jonas, who was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so*", said he, "*shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*". Now Jesus, having died on Friday, at the ninth hour, or three o'clock in the afternoon, and risen again the second day early in the morning, was not "*three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*". Besides, the obscure manner in which Jesus

expressed himself in this pretended prediction could not enable the priests and pharisees to conclude that he must die and rise again, or excite their alarm; unless it is pretended, that on this occasion these enemies of Jesus received the interpretation of the mysterious prediction by a particular revelation.

John tells us, that when Jesus was taken down from the cross by Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus brought a mixture of aloes and myrrh, weighing about a hundred pounds, to embalm him, and that he afterwards took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, applied the spices according to the practice of the Jews in their funeral ceremonies, and laid it in the tomb. Thus was Jesus embalmed, carried away, and buried. On the other hand, Matthew and Luke tell us that this sepulchre and embalming were performed in presence of Mary Magdalane and Mary the mother of Jesus, who consequently must have known what Nicodemus had done; yet Mark, forgetting all this, tells us that these same women brought sweet spices (aromatics) in order to embalm his body, and came for that purpose early in the morning of the day subsequent to the Sabbath. Luke has no better memory: he informs us that these ladies came also to embalm a dead body, which, according to John, had already received a hundred pounds weight of aromatics, and was inclosed in a sepulchre, the entrance of which was blocked up by a massy stone that embarrassed the women as much at finding it as the incredulous are with these contradictions of our evangelists.

The ladies, however, who felt interrupted by the stone, had no dread of the guard which Matthew placed at the

entrance of the tomb. But if these women knew that Jesus was to rise again at the end of three days, why were they so careful in embalming his body? — unless indeed we suppose that Jesus made a secret to his mother and the tender Magdalane, of an event, which, it is asserted, was publicly predicted, and perfectly well known not only to his disciples, but to the priests and pharisees. According to Matthew, the precautions used were founded on the fear the priests entertained that the disciples should come and carry away the body, and afterwards say unto the people, that Jesus had risen from the dead; an error, which, in their opinion, would be more dangerous than the first. Nevertheless, we find several women and disciples continually roaming about the tomb, going and coming freely, and offering to embalm the same dead body twice. It must be acknowledged, that all this surpasses human understanding.

It is not more easy to conceive the conduct of the guards placed near the tomb at the solicitation of the priests, or that of the priests themselves. According to Matthew, these guards, terrified at the resurrection of Jesus, ran to Jerusalem to tell the priests, "*that the angel of the Lord had descended from heaven, and taken away the stone which blocked up the tomb; and that at the sight of him they had nearly expired through fear.*" On this the priests, not at all doubting the truth of the relation of the guards, enjoined them to say publicly that the disciples of Jesus had carried away his body during the night, and while they were asleep. They also gave the soldiers money to speak in this manner, and promised to pacify the governor if he intended to punish them for their negligence.

The guards, it will be observed, did not say they had seen Jesus rise; they pretended merely to have seen "*the angel of the Lord descending from heaven, and rolling away the stone which was at the entrance of the tomb.*" Thus this history announces *an apparition* only, and not *a resurrection*. We might explain it in a manner natural enough by supposing that during the night, while the guards were asleep, the adherents of Jesus came by the light of flambeaus, with an armed force to open the tomb and intimidate the soldiers, who, in the alarm imagined they had seen their prey taken out of their hands by a supernatural power; and that they afterwards affirmed all this in order to justify themselves.

The most singular circumstance is the conduct of the priests, who believed the story of the guards, and consequently gave credit to a miracle strong enough to convince them of the power of Jesus. But far from being convinced by the prodigy which they thus believed, they gave money to the soldiers to engage them to tell, not the incident as it occurred, but that the disciples of Jesus came by night to take away the body of their master. On the other hand, the guards, who must have been more dead than alive through terror at the spectacle they had witnessed, accepted money for publishing a falsehood; a conduct for which the angel of the Lord might very properly have punished them. Far, however, from dreading punishment, these soldiers for a sum of money consented to betray their consciences. But could the Jewish priests, however base we may suppose them, be silly enough to imagine that these men, after having witnessed so striking a miracle, would be very faithful in preserving the secret? It must have been an

insignificant miracle indeed which could make no impression either on the soldiers who had seen it, or on the priests who believed it on the relation of these soldiers. If the priests were convinced of the reality of the miracle, was it not natural that they should recognize Jesus for the messiah, and that they should unite with him in laboring to deliver their country from the yoke of idolaters?

On this occasion, indeed, the angel of the Lord seems to have bungled the affair, by so terrifying the soldiers that they fled without having time to see Jesus rising from the dead; whose resurrection, however, was the object of all this pompous preparation. Very far from allowing it to be seen by any one, this awkward angel chased away the guards who ought to have been the witnesses of the mighty wonder. It appears, in fact, that the transaction or Jesus' resurrection was seen by nobody. His disciples did not see it; the soldiers, who guarded his tomb, did not see it; and the priests and Jews did not hold this fact to be so memorable as some persons who beheld no part of it. It was only after his resurrection that Jesus showed himself. But to whom did he show himself? To disciples, interested in saying that he was risen again; to women, who to the same interest joined also weak minds and ardent imaginations, disposed to form phantoms and chimeras.

These remarks will enable us to judge of all the pretended appearances of Jesus after his resurrection. Besides, the evangelists are not unanimous as to these appearances. Matthew relates, that Jesus showed himself to Mary Magdalane and the other Mary; John makes mention of Mary Magdalane singly. Matthew tells us, that Jesus

showed himself to the two Marys on the road whilst returning from the sepulchre on purpose to apprise the disciples of what they had seen. John informs us, that Mary Magdalane, after visiting the sepulchre, carried the news to the disciples, and thereafter returned to this same sepulchre, where she beheld Jesus in the company of angels. Matthew affirms, that the two Marys embraced the feet of Jesus. John says, Jesus forbade Mary Magdalane to touch him. Matthew informs us, that Jesus bade the two Marys tell his disciples *that he was going into Galilee*. John says, Jesus ordered Mary to acquaint his disciples, *that he was going to his Father*; that is, to heaven. But it is more singular still, that, according to Mark, the disciples themselves were not inclined to credit the apparition of Jesus to Magdalane. Agreeably to Luke, they treated all that she told them of angels, as reveries. According to John, Magdalane herself did not at first believe that she had seen her adorable lover, whom she took for the gardener.

There is no greater certainty in the apparition of Jesus to Peter and John. These two apostles went to the sepulchre, but they did not find their dear master. According to John, he himself saw neither Jesus nor his angels. From Luke it appears, that these apostles arrived *after* the angels were gone; and from John, *before* the angels had arrived. The witnesses are, indeed, very little unanimous as to these angels, who seem to have been seen only by the good ladies, whom they charged to announce to the disciples the resurrection of Jesus. Matthew makes mention of *one angel* only, whom Mark calls *a young man*.

John affirms that there were *two*.

It is said that Jesus showed himself again to two disciples of Emaus, called *Simon* and *Cleophas*; but they did not recognize him, though they had lived familiarly with him. They proceeded a long while in his company without suspecting who he was—a circumstance which, undoubtedly, evinced a very strange failure of memory. It is true, Luke tells us that their *eyes were as if shut*. Is it not very singular that Jesus should show himself in order not to be known again? They, however, recognized him afterwards; but immediately dreading, as it would seem, to be seen too nearly, the phantom disappeared. The two disciples went immediately and announced the news to their brethren assembled at Jerusalem, where Jesus arrived fully as soon as they.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke, agree in telling us, that when the disciples were informed of the resurrection of Jesus, they saw him for the first and last time. But the author of the Acts of the Apostles, John and Paul contradict this assertion, for they speak of several other appearances which afterwards occurred. Matthew and Mark inform us, that the disciples received orders to go and join Jesus *in Galilee*; but Luke and the author of the Acts (i.e. the same Luke) says, that the disciples were ordered *not to go out of Jerusalem*. As to this last apparition, Matthew places it on a *mountain in Galilee*, where Jesus had fixed the rendezvous for the evening of the day of his resurrection; whilst Luke informs us that it was at Jerusalem, and tells us that immediately thereafter Jesus ascended into heaven, and disappeared forever. Yet the

author of the Acts of the Apostles is not of this opinion: he maintains, *against himself*, that Jesus tarried still forty days with his disciples in order to instruct them.

There still remain to be considered two appearances of Jesus to his apostles, the one at which Thomas was not present, and refused to believe those who assured him of their having seen their master, and the other when Thomas recognized his master, who showed him his wounds. To render one of these apparitions more marvellous, they assure us that Jesus was seen in the midst of his disciples whilst the doors were shut. But this will not appear surprising to those who know that Jesus after his resurrection, had an immaterial or incorporeal body, which could make itself a passage through the smallest orifices. His disciples took him for a *spirit*: yet this *spirit* had wounds, was palpable, and took food. But, perhaps, all this was only chimerical, and those apparitions mere illusions. Indeed, how could the apostles be assured of the reality of what they saw? A being who has the power of changing the course of nature, can destroy all the rules by which we judge of certainty: how then could they ever be certain of having seen Jesus after his resurrection?

John speaks of several appearances of Jesus to his disciples, of which no mention is made by the other evangelists: hence we see that his testimony destroys theirs, or that theirs destroy his. As to the apparitions of Jesus which Paul mentions, he was not a witness of them, and knew them only by hearsay; we find him accordingly speaking of them in a manner not very exact. He says that Jesus showed himself "to the twelve," while it is evident

that, by the death of Judas, the apostolic college was reduced to eleven. We are surprized to see these inaccuracies in an inspired author; they may render suspicious what he likewise says of the apparition of Jesus to five hundred of the brethren at once. As to himself we know, that he never saw his master but in a *vision*; and considering the testimonies on which the resurrection of Jesus is founded, perhaps we may say as much of the other apostles and disciples. They were Jews, enthusiasts, and prophets; and consequently subject to dreaming even while awake. The incredulous consider this to be the most favorable opinion they can form of witnesses who attest the resurrection of the Saviour, on which however the Christian religion is solely established.

It appears, indeed, most certain from the nature of the testimonies we have examined, that providence has in a singular manner neglected to give to an event so memorable and of such great importance, the authenticity it seemed to require. Laying aside faith, which never experiences any difficulty about proofs, no man can believe facts, even the most natural, from vouchers so faulty, proofs so weak, relations so contradictory, and testimonies so suspicious as those which the evangelists furnish us on the most incredible and marvellous occurrence that was ever related. Independent of the visible interest these historians had in establishing the belief of the resurrection of their master, and which ought to put us on our guard against them, they seem to have written merely to contradict one another, and reciprocally weaken their evidence. To adopt relations in which we have only a tissue of contradictions, improbable

facts, and absurdities, calculated to destroy all confidence in history, requires indeed grace from above. Yet Christians do not for a moment doubt the resurrection; and their belief in this respect is founded on a *rock*; that is on prejudices they have never examined, and to which from early infancy their spiritual guides have prudently attached the greatest importance. They teach them to immolate reason, judgment, and good sense, on the altar of faith. After this sacrifice, it is no longer difficult to make them acknowledge, without enquiry, the most palpable absurdities for truths, on which it is not permitted even to be sceptical.

It is in vain that people of sense demonstrate the falsity of these pretended truths; it is in vain that an intelligent critic stands up against interested testimonies, visibly suggested by enthusiasm and imposture; it is in vain, that humanity exclaims against wars, massacres, and horrors without number, which absurd disputes on absurd dogmas have occasioned. They silence the credulous by saying, that "it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nought the understanding of the prudent. — Where is the wise? Where are the scribes? (the doctors of the law). Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world by causing the foolishness of the gospel to be preached?" It is by such declamations against reason and wisdom that fanatics and impostors have almost banished good sense from the earth, and formed slaves who make a merit of rejecting reason, of extinguishing a sacred torch which would conduct them with certainty, on purpose to lead them astray in the darkness which these interested guides know how to infuse into minds.

The dogma of the resurrection of Jesus is only attested by men whose subsistence depended on that absurd romance; and as roguery continually belies itself, these witnesses could not agree among themselves in their evidence. They tell us, that Jesus had publicly predicted his own resurrection. He ought therefore to have risen publicly; he ought to have shewn himself, not in secret to his disciples, but openly to priests, pharisees, doctors, and men of understanding, especially after having intimated, that it was the *only sign which would be given them*. Was it not acknowledging the falsehood of his mission, to refuse the sign by which he had solemnly promised to prove the truth of that mission? Was it reasonable to require the Jews to believe, on the word of his disciples, a fact which he could have demonstrated before their own eyes? How is it possible for rational persons of the present age to believe, after the lapse of eighteen hundred years, on the discordant testimonies of four interested evangelists, fanatics, or fabulists, a story which they could not make be believed in their own time; except by a small number of imbecile people, incapable of reasoning, fond of the marvellous, and of too limited understandings to escape the snares laid for their simplicity. A Roman governor, a tetrarch, a Jewish high priest, converted by the apparition of Jesus, would have made a greater impression on a man of sense than a hundred secret apparitions to his chosen disciples. The conversion of the Sanhedrim at Jerusalem to the faith, would have been of greater weight than all the obscure rabble which the apostles prevailed on to believe their improbable marvels, and persuaded that they had seen Jesus alive after his death.

If the apparitions of Jesus to his apostles were not obviously fables invented by roguery, or adopted through enthusiasm and ignorance, the motive of these clandestine visits cannot be divined. Become incapable of suffering, and re-established in his divine omnipotence, was he still afraid of the Jews? Could he dread being put to death a second time? By again showing himself, had he not better reason to calculate on converting them than he derived from all his sermons and miracles?

But it is said that the Jews by their opposition deserved to be rejected; that the views of providence were changed; and that God no longer wished his chosen people should be converted. These answers are so many insults to the Divinity. How is it possible for men to withstand God? Is it not to deny the Divine Omnipotence to pretend that man can oppose its will? Man, it is asserted, is free; but must not a God who knew every thing, have foreseen that the Jews would abuse their liberty by resisting his will? In that case why send them his Son? Why make him suffer to no purpose an infamous and cruel death? Why not send him at once to creatures disposed to hear him, and render him homage? To pretend that the views of providence were changed, is it not to attack the divine immutability? Unless indeed it be said, that Deity had from all eternity resolved on this change; which, however, will not shelter that immutability.

Thus, in whatever point of view we contemplate the matter, it will remain a decided fact, that the resurrection of Jesus, far from being founded on solid proofs, unexceptionable testimony, and respectable authority, is obviously

established on falsehood and knavery, which pervade every page of the discordant relations of those who have pretended to vouch it.

After having made their hero revive and show himself, we know not how often, to his trusty disciples, it was necessary in the end to make him disappear altogether—to send him back to heaven, in order to conclude the romance. But our story-tellers are not more in union on his disappearance than on other things. They agree neither as to the time nor the place of Jesus' ascension. Mark and Luke inform us, that Jesus after having shown himself to the eleven apostles while they were at table, and spoken to them, ascended into heaven. Luke adds, that he conducted them as far as Bethany; lifted up his hands and blessed them, and was afterwards carried up to heaven. Mark contradicts Luke, and makes Jesus ascend to heaven from Galilee: and as if he had seen what passed on high, places him on the right hand of God, who on this occasion yielded to him the place of honor. Matthew and John do not speak of this ascension. If we leave it to them, we must say, that Jesus is still on earth according to the first of these evangelists, his last words to his disciples gave them to understand, that he would "*remain with them until the end of the world.*" To fix our ideas on this subject, Luke tells us, as we have seen, that Jesus ascended into heaven the very evening of the day of the resurrection. But he afterwards informs us, that Jesus tarried *forty days after his resurrection* with his disciples. Faith only can extricate us from this embarrassment. John advances nothing in the matter; but leaves us in uncertainty as to the time which Jesus passed

on earth after his resurrection. Some unbelievers on observing the romantic style of the gospel of this apostle, have concluded from the manner in which he finishes his history, that he meant to give free course to the fables which might afterwards be published about Jesus. He terminates his narrative with these words: "*Jesus did also many other things, and if they should be written every one, I suppose, that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written*", and with this hyperbole, the well-beloved apostle finishes the Platonic romance which he made about his master.

CHAPTER XVII

GENERAL REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE OF JESUS – PREACHING OF THE APOSTLES – CONVERSION OF St. PAUL – ESTABLISHMENT OF CHRISTIANITY – PERSECUTIONS IT SUFFERS – CAUSES OF ITS PROGRESS

The mere reading of the life of Jesus, as we have represented it according to documents which Christians consider *inspired*, must be sufficient to undeceive every thinking being. But it is the property of superstition to prevent thinking: it benumbs the soul, confounds the reason, perverts the judgment, renders doubtful the most obvious truths, and makes a merit with its slaves of despising inquiry, and of relying on the word of those who govern them. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to offer some reflections which may be useful to those who have not courage to draw out of the preceding inquiry the consequences which naturally result from it; and thus aid

them in forming rational ideas of the Jesus they adore, of his disciples whom they revere, and of books which they are accustomed to regard as sacred.

Our examination of the birth of Jesus ought to render it very suspicious. We have found the Holy Spirit mistaken on that important article of Jesus' life; for he inspired two evangelists with two very different genealogies. Notwithstanding so striking a blunder, and the consanguinity of Mary and Elizabeth wife of the priest Zacharias, we shall not cavil on these points. We shall grant that Mary might really be of the race of David: many examples demonstrate that the branches of races more illustrious have fallen into misery. Departing also from the supposition that Mary, the *immaculate* wife of Joseph, may have willingly yielded to the angel, or, simple and devout, may have been deceived by the angel, there is every reason to believe that she afterwards taught her son his descent from David, and perhaps, some marvellous circumstances which, by justifying the mother, might kindle the enthusiasm of the child. Thus Jesus, at a very early age, might be really persuaded of his royal extraction, and of the wonders which had accompanied his birth. These ideas might afterwards inflame his ambition, and lead him to think that he was destined to play a grand part in his native country. Prepossessed with these notions, and intoxicating himself more and more by the perusal of obscure prophecies and traditions, it is very possible that our adventurer [Jesus] might believe himself actually called by the Divinity, and pointed out by the prophets to be the reformer, the chief,

and the messiah of Israel. He was indeed a visionary, and found people silly enough to be caught by his reveries.

Another cause might likewise contribute to heat the brain of our missionary. Some learned men have conjectured with much appearance of truth that Jesus acquired his morality among a kind of monks or Jewish Coenobites (friars) called *Therapeutes* or Essenians. We certainly find a striking conformity between what Philo tells us of these pious enthusiasts, and the sublime precepts of Jesus. The Therapeutes abandoned father and mother, wife, children, and property, in order to devote themselves to contemplation. They explained the scripture in a manner purely allegorical; abstained from oaths; lived in common; suffered with resolution the misfortunes of life, and died with joy. It is certain that, in the time of the historian Josephus, three sects were reckoned in Judea -- the pharisees, Sadducees, and the Essenians or Essenes. From the time of that writer, there is no longer any mention made of the latter; hence some have concluded that these Essenians, or Therapeutes, were afterwards confounded or incorporated with the first Christians, who, according to every evidence, led a manner of life perfectly similar to theirs. From all this it may be concluded, either that Jesus had been a Therapeute before his preaching, or that he had borrowed their doctrines.

Whatever may be in this, in the midst of an ignorant and superstitious nation, perpetually fed with oracles and pompous promises; miserable at that time and discontented with the Roman yoke; continually cajoled with the expectation of a deliverer, who was to restore them with honor, our enthusiast without difficulty found an audience,

and, by degrees, adherents. Men are naturally disposed to listen to and believe those who make them hope for an end to their miseries. Misfortunes render them timorous and credulous, and lead them to superstition. A fanatic easily makes conquests among a wretched people. It is not then wonderful that Jesus should soon acquire partizans, especially among the populace who in every country are easily seduced.

Our hero knew the weakness of his fellow-citizens. They wanted prodigies, and he, *in their eyes*, performed them. A stupid people, totally strangers to the natural sciences, to medicine, or to the resources of artifice, easily mistook very simple operations for miracles, and attributed effects to the finger of God, which might be owing to the knowledge Jesus had acquired during the long interval that preceded his mission. Nothing is more common than the combination of enthusiasm and imposture; the most sincere devotees, when they intend to advance what they believe to be the word of God, often countenance frauds which they style *pious*. There are but few zealots who do not even think crimes allowable when the interests of religion are concerned. In religion, as at play, *one begins with being dupe, and ends with being knave*.

Thus, on considering things attentively, and comparing the different accounts of the life of Jesus, we must be persuaded that he was a fanatic who really thought himself inspired, favored by Heaven, sent to his nation; in short, that he was the messiah, who, to support his divine mission, felt no difficulty to employ such deceptions as were best calculated for a people to whom miracles were

absolutely necessary; and whom, without miracles, the most eloquent harangues, the wisest precepts, the most intelligent counsels, and the truest principles could never have convinced. A medley of enthusiasm and juggling constitute the character of Jesus, and it is that of all spiritual adventurers who assume the name of Reformers, or become the chiefs of a sect.

We always find Jesus, during his whole mission, preaching the Kingdom of his Father, and supporting his preaching with wonders. At first, he spoke in a very reserved manner of his quality of messiah, Son of God, and son of David. There was prudence in not giving himself out for such. But he suffered the secret to be revealed by the mouth of the devil, to impose silence on whom he commonly took great care; not, however, until after the devil had spoken in a manner sufficiently intelligible to make an impression on the spectators. So that with the assistance of his possessed, his proselytes, or his convulsionaries, he procured testimonies which from his own mouth would have been very suspicious, and might have rendered him odious.

Our operator also took care to choose his ground for performing miracles; he constantly refused to operate before those whom he supposed inclined to criticise his wonders. If he sometimes performed them in the synagogues, and in presence of the doctors, it was in the certainty that the less fastidious populace, who believed in his miracles, would take his part and defend him against the evil designs of the more acute spectators.

The apostles of Jesus appear to have been men of their master's temper—credulous or misled enthusiasts, dexterous cheats, or often both together. Jesus, who had skill in men, admitted into his intimate confidence those only in whom he remarked the most submissive credulity or the greatest address. On important occasions, such as the miracle of multiplying the loaves, the transfiguration, etc. we find, as already noticed, that he used always the ministry of Peter, James, and John.

It is easy to conceive that his disciples were attached to him from interest or credulity. The most crafty perceived that their fortune could only be ameliorated under the conduct of a man who knew how to impose on the vulgar, and to make his followers live at the expence of charitable devotees. Fishermen, formerly obliged to subsist by painful and often unsuccessful labour, conceived that it was more advantageous to attach themselves to one who without trouble made them live comfortably. The most credulous expected to make a brilliant fortune, and to fill posts of eminence in the new kingdom their chief intended to establish. *It was evidently from earthly or interested motives, and not heavenly, that the apostles attached themselves to Jesus.* At the last supper there was a strife amongst them *who should be accounted the greatest.* "The meanest," as Bishop Parker expressed it, "hoped at least to have been made lord mayor of Capernaum." And even at his ascension the only question his disciples asked was, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?"

The hopes and comforts of both vanished on the death of Jesus. The pusillanimous lost courage, but the most able and

subtle did not think it necessary to abandon the party. They therefore contrived, as we have seen, the tale of the resurrection, by the aid of which the reputation of their master and their own fortune were secured. It also appears that **the apostles never sincerely believed their master was a God**. The 'Acts' incontestibly demonstrate the contrary. The same Simon Peter who had recognized Jesus for the Son of the living God, declared in his first sermon that he was man. "*Ye know,*" says he, "*that Jesus of Nazareth was a MAN whom God hath rendered famous among you – Yet ye have crucified him – but God hath raised him up again*". This passage proves clearly that the chief of the apostles dared not yet hazard, or was wholly ignorant of the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus, which was afterwards contrived by the self-interest of the clergy and adopted by the foolishness of Christians, whose credulity was never startled by the greatest absurdities. Self-interest and folly have perpetuated this doctrine until our time. By dint of repeating the same tales for so long a period, they have succeeded in making people believe the most ridiculous fables. **The religion of the children is always regulated by the fancy of their fathers.**

It appears, however, that the apostles of Jesus, deprived of the counsels of their master, could not have succeeded if they had not received powerful aid after his death, and selected associates, men more active than themselves, and better calculated for the business. They deliberated together on their common interests; it was then that the Holy Spirit descended on them; that is, they considered on the means of earning a subsistence, gaining proselytes, and increasing the number of their adherents, in order to secure themselves

against the enterprizes of the priests and grandees of the nation, whom the new sect might have very much displeased. Not satisfied with having put Jesus to death, they had the impudence to persecute his disciples. They engaged Herod to destroy James the brother of Jesus; finally they caused Stephen to be stoned. These priests and doctors did not perceive that persecution is the surest method of spreading fanaticism, and that it always gives importance to the party persecuted.

Accordingly this persecuting spirit, inherent in the clergy, created new partisans to the persecuted sect. Hard treatment, and imprisonment always render sectaries more obstinate, and interesting objects to those who witness their sufferings. Tortures excite our pity in behalf of the person who endures them. Every fanatic that is punished is certain of finding credulous friends to aid him, because they persuade themselves it is for truth he is persecuted.

The proceedings instigated by the priests, convinced the new sectaries that it was of the utmost importance to unite their interests. They felt it necessary to avoid quarrels, and every thing which could create division; they in consequence lived in concord and peace.

The apostles, now having become heads of the sect, did not neglect their own interests. One of the first faculties with which the Holy Spirit inspired them was to profit by devout souls, and engage them to place all their property in common. The apostles were the depositaries of these goods, and had under their orders ministers or servants, known by the name of deacons, charged with the distribution of alms.

These great saints, it is to be presumed, did not forget themselves in these distributions. It appears also that the law for this communion of goods was observed with rigor, as we find, in the '*Acts of the Apostles*', Ananias and Saphira struck dead on the prayer of Peter for having had the temerity to retain a portion of their own property: a conduct which would appear as unjust, as barbarous in any other person but an apostle of Jesus. It must however be acknowledged that the law, which obliged the rich to place their property in common, was very important not only to the apostles but for increasing the sect. The poor undoubtedly must have been eager to join a party where the rich engaged to *lay the cloth*. Hence, it is easy to perceive how this institution might augment the number of the faithful without a miracle.

Of all the adherents the new-born sect acquired, there was none superior to Saul, afterwards known by the name of Paul. The actions and writings ascribed to this Apostle exhibit him as an ambitious, active, intrepid, and opiniative man, full of enthusiasm and capable of inspiring others with it. Engaged at first in the profession of a tent-maker, he afterwards attached himself to Gamaliel, a doctor of the law and rendered services to the priests in their persecutions against Christians. Perceiving the utility which a man of Saul's character might be of to the party, the apostles profited by some disgust he had taken to draw him over to their sect. He consented readily conceiving that by his superior talents he might easily succeed in making himself the head of a party, to which he also knew the means of rendering himself necessary. He pretended, therefore, that

his conversion was the effect of a miracle, and that God himself had called him. He was baptised at Damascus, joined the apostles at Jerusalem, was admitted a member of their college, and soon gave them proofs of his talents. He commenced preaching Jesus and his resurrection, and labored in gaining souls. His vehement zeal hurried him, without fear or hesitation, into quarrels with the priests, always indignant at the conduct of the apostles; but his persecutions rendered him dearer to his party, of which he became from that time the prime mover.

Often maltreated by the Jews, Paul conjectured that it would be beneficial not to confine himself to them, but that conquests might be made among the heathen. He no doubt knew that mankind resemble each other in all superstitions; that they are everywhere curious about the marvellous, susceptible of fanaticism, lovers of novelties, and easily deceived. He, therefore, sometimes preached to Jews, and sometimes to Gentiles, among whom he succeeded in enlisting a considerable number of recruits.

Jesus, born in the bosom of Judaism, and knowing the attachment of his fellow-citizens to the law of Moses, had always openly declared that he was come to "*accomplish, and not to destroy it.*" His first apostles were Jews, and showed much attachment to the rites of their religion. They were displeased that Paul their brother would not subject his Gentile proselytes to Judaical usages. Filled with views more vast than those entertained by the other apostles, he did not wish to disgust his new converts with inconvenient [Judaical] ceremonies, such as circumcision and abstinence from certain meats. The better to attain his ends, he

neglected these usages, which he considered as trifles, while his brethren regarded them as most essential. The first proselytes or the apostles were called *Nazarenes* or *Ebionites*, who believed in Jesus without forsaking the law of Moses. They of course regarded Paul as an *heretic* or *apostate*. This fact, attested by Origen, Eusebius, and Epiphanius, is important in giving us a distinct idea of primitive Christianity, which we see divided into two sects almost as soon as Paul had embraced it. This new apostle very soon indeed separated from his brethren to preach a doctrine different from theirs, and openly undermined the Judaism which Peter, James, and the other heads of the church persisted in respecting. But as Paul was successful among the Gentiles, his party prevailed: Judaism was entirely proscribed, and Christianity became quite a new religion, of which Judaism had been only the figure. Thus Paul wholly changed the religious system of Jesus, who had merely proposed to reform Judaism. The principal apostles followed the conduct of their master [Jesus], and showed themselves much attached to the law and usages of their fathers. Paul, notwithstanding their protestations, took a different course; he displayed a contempt or indifference for the legal ordinances, to which through policy, however, he sometimes subjected himself. Thus we find he circumcised Timothy, and performed Jewish ceremonies in the temple of Jerusalem.

Not content with decrying the law of Moses, Paul, by his own confession, preached a gospel of his own. He says positively in his Epistle to the Galatians that "*the gospel which I preach is not after men*", and that he had received it by

a particular revelation of Jesus. He speaks likewise of his quarrels with the other heads of the sect, but his disciple Luke passes over these very slightly in the 'Acts', which are much more the '*Acts of Paul*' than the '*Acts of the Apostles*'. It appears evident that he embroiled himself with his brethren, the partisans of the circumcision and the founders of the Nazarenes or Ebionites, who had a gospel different from that of Paul, as they combined the law of Jesus with that of Moses. Irenaeus, Justin, Epiphanius, Eusebius, Theodoret, and Augustine, agree in telling us that these Ebionites, or converted Jews, regarded Jesus as a "mere man, son of Joseph and Mary, to whom they gave the name of 'Son of God' only on account of his virtues." From this it is evident that it was Paul who deified Jesus and abolished Judaism. The Paulites, becoming the strongest, prevailed over the Ebionites, or disciples of the apostles, and regarded them as heretics. Hence, we see that it is the religion of Paul, and not of Jesus, which at present subsists.

This altercation of Paul and the apostles of Jesus produced a real schism. Paul left the preaching of the Judaical gospel or circumcision to his brethren, whilst he preached his own in Asia Minor and in Greece, sometimes to the Hellenistic Jews, whom he found established there, and sometimes to the idolatrous Greeks, whose language, though unknown to the other apostles, Paul was acquainted with. The success of his mission far surpassed that of his brethren; and if we refer to the 'Acts of the Apostles', we shall perceive in this new preacher an activity, a warmth, a vehemence, and an enthusiasm well adapted to communicate itself. The missionaries he formed spread his doctrine

to a great distance. The gospel of the apostle of the gentiles prevailed over the gospel of the Judaizing apostles; and in a short time there were a great number of Christians in all the provinces of the Roman empire.

To a miserable people, crushed by tyrants and oppressors of every kind, the principles of the new sect had powerful attractions. Its maxims, which tended to introduce equality and a community of goods, were calculated to entice the unfortunate. Its promises flattered miserable fanatics, to whom was announced the end of a perverse world, the approaching arrival of Jesus, and a kingdom wherein abundance and happiness would reign. To be admitted there, they merely required of the proselytes "*to believe in Jesus and be baptized.*" As for the austere maxims of the sect, they were not of a nature to disgust miserables, accustomed to suffering and the want of the conveniences of life. Its dogmas, few in the beginning, were readily adopted by ignorant men, fond of wonders, whom their own mythology disposed to receive the fables of Christians. Besides, their own priests wrought miracles, which rendered those said to have been performed by Jesus no way improbable in their estimation. Different missionaries, in emulation of one another, composed romances or histories of Jesus in which they related a number of prodigies calculated to make their hero be revered, and to interest the veneration of the faithful. In this manner, the different collections, known by the name of Gospels, were framed, wherein, along with very simple facts which might have really occurred, we find numerous statements that appear credible only to enthusiasts and fools. These

histories, composed from traditions by different hands and by authors of very different characters, are not in harmony. Hence the want of conformity in the relations of our evangelists, which has been frequently noticed in the course of this work. There were, as we have before remarked, a vast number of gospels in the first ages of the church; and out of these the Council of Nice chose only four, to which they gave the *divine* sanction.

We shall not here examine whether these gospels really belong to the authors to whom they are ascribed. The opinion which attributes them to their putative writers might have been founded at first on some tradition, true or false, which existed in the time of the Council of Nice, or which the fathers of that council had an interest in sanctioning. It is difficult to persuade ourselves without faith that the Gospel of John, filled with Platonic notions could be composed by the son of Zebedee - a poor fisherman, who, perhaps, incapable of writing and even reading, could not be acquainted with the philosophy of Plato. From the commencement of Christianity there have been many who have denied the authenticity of the gospels. Marcias accused them of being filled with falsehoods. The Alloges and Theodocians rejected the Gospel of John, which they regarded as a tissue of lies. Augustin says that he found in the Platonists the whole beginning of the Gospel of John. Origen below informs us that Celsus reproached Jesus with having taken from Plato his finest maxims, and among others the one which says that "*it is more easy for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to be saved.*"

Whatever opinion may be formed as to this, we find the mystical and marvellous philosophy of Plato introduced very early into Christianity, which agreed in several respects with the tenets held by the followers of that eminent philosopher; while his perplexed philosophy must also have easily amalgamated with the principles of the new sect. This was the source of *Spirituality*, *Trinity*, and the *Logos*, or *Word*, besides a multitude of magical and theurgical ceremonies which in the hands of the priests of Christianity have become *mysteries* or *sacraments*. On reading Porphyry, Jamblichus, and particularly Plotinus, we are surprised to hear them speaking so frequently in the same style as our theologians. These marks of resemblance drew several Platonists over to the faith, who figured among the doctors of the church. Of this number were Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Origen, etc. **Platonism may indeed be regarded as the source of the principal dogmas and mysteries of the Christian religion.**

Those who doubt the truth of this assertion have only to read the works of the disciples of Plato, who were all superstitious persons and Theurgists, whose ideas were analogous to those of Christians. We find, indeed, these writings filled with receipts to make the gods and good genii descend, and to drive away the bad. Tertullian reproaches the heretics of his time with having wandered astray in order to introduce Platonism, Stoicism, and Dialects into Christianity. It was evidently the mixture of the unintelligible doctrine of Plato with the Dialectics of Aristotle, which rendered theology so senseless, disputable, and fraught with subtleties. The cardinal Pallavicini

acknowledges that "*without Aristotle the Christians would have wanted a great number of articles of faith.*"

The austere and fanatical lives of Christians must also have favorably disposed a great number of Stoics, who were accustomed to make a merit of despising objects desirable to other men, depriving themselves of the comforts of life, and braving affliction and death. We accordingly find among the early Christians a great number of enthusiasts tinctured with these maxims. This fanatical way of thinking was necessary to console the first Christians in the midst of persecutions which they suffered at first from the Jews, and thereafter from the emperors and grandees, incited by the heathen priests. The latter, according to the custom of the priesthood in all countries, made war on a sect which attacked their Gods, and menaced their temples with a general desertion. The universe was weary of the impostures and exactions of these priests, their costly sacrifices and lying oracles. Their knaveries had been frequently unveiled, and the new religion tendered to mankind a worship less expensive and, which, without being addressed so much to the eyes as the worship of idols, was better adapted than its rival to seize the imagination and to excite enthusiasm.

Christianity was moreover flattering and consolatory to the wretched; while it placed all men on the same level, and thus humbled the rich, it was announced as destined for the poor through preference. Among the Romans, slaves were in some measure excluded from religion; and it might have been said that the gods did not concern themselves with the homage of these degraded beings. The poor, besides, had

not wherewith to satisfy the rapacity of Pagan priests, who, like ours, did nothing without money. Thus, slaves and miserable persons must have been strongly attached to a system which taught that all men are equal in the eyes of the Divinity, and that the wretched have better right to the favors of a suffering and contemned God than those who are temporally happy. The priests of Paganism became uneasy at the rapid progress of the sect. The government was alarmed at the clandestine assemblies which the Christians held. They were believed to be the enemies of the emperors, because they refused to offer sacrifices to the gods of the country for their prosperity. Even the people, ever zealous, believed them enemies of their gods because they would not join in their worship. They treated the Christians as Atheists and impious persons, because they [Pagans] did not conceive what could be the objects of their adoration; and because they took offence at the mysteries which they saw them celebrating in the greatest secrecy. The Christians, thus loaded with the public hatred, very soon became its victims; they were persecuted; and persecution, as it always happens, rendered them more opiniative. Enthusiasm inflamed their souls; they considered it a glory to resist the efforts of tyrants; they even went so far as to brave their punishments, and concluded with believing that the greatest happiness was to perish under their severities. In this they flattered themselves with resembling the Son of God, and were persuaded that by dying for his cause they were certain of reigning with him in heaven.

In consequence of these fanatical ideas, so flattering to vanity, martyrdom became an object of ambition to

Christians. Independent of the heavenly rewards, which they believed assured to those who suffered with constancy, and perished for religion, they saw them esteemed, revered, and carefully attended to during their lives, while honors almost divine were decreed them after death. On the contrary, those of the Christian community who had the weakness to shrink from tortures, and renounce their religion, were scoffed at, despised, and regarded as *infamous*. So many circumstances combined contributed to warm the imaginations of the faithful, already sufficiently agitated by notions of the approaching end of the world, the coming of Jesus, and his happy reign. They submitted cheerfully to punishment, and gloried in their chains: they courted martyrdom as a favor, and often, through a blind zeal, provoked the rage of their persecutors. The magistrates, by their proscriptions and tortures, caused the enthusiasm of the Christians to kindle more and more. Their courage was besides supported by the heads of their sect, who constantly displayed the heavens opening to the heroes who consented to suffer and perish for their cause, which they took care to make the poor fanatics regard as the cause of God himself. [A martyr, at all times, is merely the victim of the enthusiastic or knavish priest who has been able to seduce him.](#)

Men are always disgusted with those who use violence; they conclude that they are wrong, and that those against whom they commit violence have reason on their side. Persecution will always make partisans to the cause persecuted; and those [persecutions] to which we allude tended the more to confirm Christians in their religion. The

spectators of their sufferings were interested for them. They were curious to know the principles of a sect which drew on itself such cruel treatment, and infused into its adherents a courage believed to be supernatural. They imagined that such a religion could be no other than the work of God; its partisans appeared extraordinary men, and their enthusiasm became contagious. Violence served only to spread it the more, and, according to the language of a Christian doctor, "*the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church.*"

The clergy would fain make the propagation of Christianity pass for a miracle of divine omnipotence; while it was owing solely to natural causes inherent in the human mind, which always adheres strenuously to its own way of thinking; hardens itself against violence; applauds itself for its pertinacity; admires courage in others; feels an interest for those who display it; and suffers itself to be gained by their enthusiasm. The learned Dodwell has written two copious dissertations on the martyrs: the one to prove that they were not so numerous as is commonly imagined; and the other to demonstrate that their constancy originated in natural causes. *The frenzy of martyrdom was in fact an epidemical disease among the first Christians*, to which their spiritual physicians were obliged to apply remedies, as these wretched beings were guilty of suicide. *Many of the primitive Christians, says Fleury, instead of flying as the gospel directs, not only ran voluntarily to execution, but provoked their judges to do them that favor.* Under Trajan, all the Christians in a city of Asia came in a body to the proconsul, and offered themselves to the slaughter, which made him cry, "*O! ye unhappy people, if ye have a mind to*

die, have ye not halters and precipices enough to end your lives, but ye must come here for executioners". Marcus Antoninus severely reflected on the obstinacy of the Christians in thus running headlong to death; and Cyprian labored hard to comfort those who were so unhappy as to *escape* the crown of martyrdom. Even the enemies of Julian, called the apostate by fanatics, admit that the Christians of his time did everything they could to provoke that emperor to put them to death. Dr. Hickes, a celebrated protestant divine, says that the Christians "*were not illegally persecuted by Julian.*" *Pride, vanity, prejudice, love, patriotism, and even vice itself, produce martyrs* — a contempt of every kind of danger. Is it then surprising that enthusiasm and fanaticism, the strongest of passions, have so often enabled men to face the greatest dangers and despise death? Besides, if Christians can boast a catalogue of martyrs, Jews can do the same. The unfortunate Jews, condemned to the flames by the Inquisition, were martyrs to their religion; and their fortitude proves as much in their favor as that of the Christians. If martyrs demonstrate the truth of a religion or sect, where are we to look for the true one?

It is thus obvious that *the obstinacy of the martyrs, far from being a sign of the divine protection or of the goodness of their cause, was the effect of blindness, occasioned by the reiterated lessons of their fanatical or deceitful priests.* What conduct more extravagant than that of a sovereign able and without effusion of blood to extend his power, who should prefer to do it by the massacre of the most faithful of his subjects? *Is it not annihilating the divine wisdom and goodness to assert that a God to whom everything is*

possible, among so many ways which he could have chosen to establish his religion, wished to follow that only of making its dearest friends fall a sacrifice to the fury of its cruellest enemies? Such are the notions which Christianity presents; and it is easy to perceive that they are the necessary consequences of a fundamental absurdity on which that religion is established. It maintains that a just God had no wish to redeem guilty men, than by making his dear innocent son be put to death. According to such principles, it can excite no surprise that so unreasonable a God should wish to convert the heathen, his enemies, by the murder of Christians, his children. Though these absurdities are believed, those who do not possess the *holy* blindness of faith cannot comprehend why the Son of God, having already shed his blood for the redemption of men, was not a sufficient sacrifice, and why, to effect the conversion of the world, there was still a necessity for the blood of an immense number of martyrs whose merits must have been undoubtedly much less than those of Jesus. To resolve these difficulties, theologians refer us to the eternal decrees, the wisdom of which we are not permitted to criticise. This is sending us far back indeed; yet notwithstanding the solidity of the answer, the incredulous persist in saying that their limited understandings can neither find justice, nor wisdom, nor goodness, in eternal decrees which could in so preposterous a manner effect the salvation of the human race.

Persecutions were not the only means by which Christianity was propagated. The preachers, zealous for the salvation of souls, or rather desirous to extend their own

power over the minds of men, and strengthen their party, inherited from the Jews the passion of making proselytes. This passion suited presumptuous fanatics, who were persuaded that they alone possessed the divine favor. It was unknown to the heathen, who permitted everyone to adore his gods, providing that his worship did not disturb the public tranquillity. Prompted by zeal, the Christian missionaries, notwithstanding persecutions and dangers, spread themselves with an ardor unparalleled wherever they could penetrate, in order to convert idolators and bring back *strayed* sheep to the fold of Jesus. This activity merited the recompense of great success. Men whom their idolatrous priests neglected were flattered at being courted, and becoming the objects of the cares of those who, through pure disinterestedness, came from afar, and through the greatest perils to bring them consolation. They listened favourably to them; they showed kindness to men so obliging, and were enchanted with their doctrine. Many adopted their lessons, placed themselves under their guidance, and soon became persuaded that their God and dogmas were superior to those which had preceded them.

Thus by degrees, and without a miracle, Christianity planted colonies, more or less considerable, in every part of the Roman empire. They were directed and governed by *inspectors, overseers, or bishops*, who, in spite of the dangers with which they were menaced, labored obstinately and without intermission in augmenting the number of their disciples that is, of slaves devoted to their holy will. Empire over opinions was always the most unbounded. As nothing has greater power over the minds of the vulgar than

religion, Christians everywhere displayed an unlimited submission to their spiritual sovereign, on whose laws they believed their eternal happiness depended. Thus, our missionaries, converted into bishops, exercised a spiritual magistracy and sacred jurisdiction, which in the end placed them not only above other priests, but made them respected by, and necessary to, the temporal power. Princes have always employed religion and its ministers in crushing the people and keeping them under the yoke. Impostures and delusions are of no use to sovereigns who *govern*, but they are very useful to those who *tyrannize*.

CHAPTER XVIII

ACCOUNT OF CHRISTIANITY FROM CONSTANTINE TO THE PRESENT TIME

At the end of three centuries, we find Christianity, advanced by all these means, become a formidable party in the Roman empire. The sovereign power acknowledged the impossibility of stifling it; and Christians, scattered in great numbers through all the provinces, formed an imposing combination. Ambitious chiefs incessantly wrested from one another the right of reigning over the wrecks of an enslaved republic: each sought to increase his own strength, and acquire an advantage over his rivals. It was in these circumstances that Constantine, to strengthen himself first against Maxentius, and thereafter against Licinius, thought it his interest, by a stroke of policy, to draw over all the Christians to his party. For this purpose he openly favored them, and thereby reinforced his army with all the soldiers of that numerous sect. In gratitude for the advantages they

procured him, he concluded with embracing their religion, now become so powerful. He honored, distinguished, and enriched the Christian bishops, well assured of attaching them to himself by his liberality to their pastors and the favor he shewed them. Aided by their succors, he flattered himself with the disposal of the flock.

By this political revolution, so favorable to the clergy, the bashful chiefs of the Christians, who hitherto had reigned only in secret and without *éclat*, sprung out of the dust, and became men of importance. Seconded by a despotical emperor, whose interests were linked with theirs, they soon used their influence to avenge their injuries, and return to their enemies, with usury, the evils which they had received. The unexpected change in the fortune of the Christians made them forget the mild and tolerating maxims of their legislator. They conceived, that these maxims, made for wretches destitute of power, could no longer suit men supported by sovereigns; they attacked the temples and gods of paganism; their worshipers were excluded from places of trust, and the master lavished his favors on those only who consented to think like him, and justify his change by imitating it. Thus, without any miracle, the court became Christian, or at least feigned to be so, and the descendants of hypocritical courtiers were Christians in reality.

Even before the time of Constantine, Christianity had been rent by disputes, heresies, schisms, and animosities between the Christian chiefs. The adherents of the different doctors had reviled, anathematised, and maltreated each other without their quarrels making any noise. The

subtleties of Grecian metaphysics introduced into the Christian religion, had hatched an infinity of disputes, which had not hitherto been attended with any remarkable occurrence. All these quarrels burst forth in the reign of Constantine. The bishops and champions of different parties caballed to draw over the emperor to their side, and thus aid them in crushing their adversaries. At the same time, a considerable party under the priest *Arius* denied the divinity of Jesus. Little versed in the principles of the religion that party had embraced, but wishing to decide the question, Constantine referred it to the judgment of the bishops. He convened them in the city of **Nice**, and the plurality of suffrages [votes] regulated definitively the symbol of faith—Jesus became a God *consubstantial* with his father; the Holy Ghost was likewise a God, *proceeding* from the two others; finally, these *three* Gods combined made only *one* God!

Tumultuous clamors carried this unintelligible decision, and converted it into a sacred dogma notwithstanding the reclamations of opponents, who were silenced by denouncing them blasphemers and heretics. The priests who had the strongest lungs, declared themselves *orthodox*. The emperor, little acquainted with the nature of the quarrel, ranged himself for the time on their side, and quitted it afterwards according as he thought proper to lend an ear sometimes to the bishops of one party, and sometimes to those of another. The history of the church informs us that Constantine, whom we here see adhering to the decision of the Council of Nice, made the orthodox and the heretics alternately experience his severities.

After many years, and even ages of disputes, the bishops of Christendom have agreed in regarding Jesus as a true God. They felt that it was important for them to have a God for their founder, as this could not fail to render their own claims more respected. They maintained that their authority was derived from the apostles, who held theirs directly from Christ; that is, from God himself. It would now-a-days be criminal to doubt the truth of this opinion, though many Christians are not yet convinced of it, and venture to appeal to the decision of the universal church. Except the English, all Protestant Christians reject Episcopacy, and regard it as a usurped power. Among the Catholics, the Jansenists think the same, which is the true cause of the enmity the Pope and Bishops display against them. It appears St. Jerome was, on this point, of the opinion of the Jansenists. Yet we see Paul at first much occupied in advancing the Episcopal dignity. Ignatius of Antioch, disciple of the apostles, insinuates in his epistles, the high opinion which the Christians ought to have of a bishop; and the very ancient author of the Apostolic Constitutions, openly declares, that a *bishop is a God on earth, destined to rule over all men, priests, kings, and magistrates*. Though these Constitutions are reputed Apocryphal, the bishops have conformed their conduct to them more than to the canonical gospel, wherein Jesus, far from assigning prerogatives to bishops, declares that in his kingdom there will be *neither first nor last*.

The bishops assembled at Nice decided also on the authenticity of the gospels and books ordained to serve as a rule to Christians. It is then to these doctors, as has been already remarked, that Christians owe their faith, which,

however, was afterwards frequently shaken by disputes, heresies, and wars, and even by assemblies of bishops who often annulled what other assemblies of bishops had decreed in the most solemn manner. From Constantine to our time, the interest of the heads of the church dictated every decree, and established doctrines wholly unknown to the founders of their religion. The universe became the arena of the passions, the disputes, intrigues, and cruelties of these holy gladiators, who treated each other with the utmost barbarity. Kings, united in interest with spiritual chiefs, or blinded by them, thought themselves at all times obliged to partake of their fury. Princes seemed to hold the sword for the sole purpose of cutting the throats of victims pointed out by the priests. These blinded rulers believed they served God, or promote the welfare of their kingdoms by espousing all the passions of the priests who were become the most arrogant, the most vindictive, the most covetous, and the most flagitious of men.

We shall not enter into a detail of all the quarrels which the Christian religion has produced. We shall merely observe, that they were continual, and have frequently been attended with consequences so deplorable that nations have had reason more than a hundred times every century to regret the peaceful paganism, and tolerating idolatry of their ancestors. The gospel, or *the glad tidings*, constantly gave the signal for the commission of crimes. **The Cross was the Banner under which madmen assembled to glut the earth with blood.** The will of heaven was understood by nobody: and the clergy disputed without end on the manner of explaining oracles, which the Deity had himself

come to reveal to mortals. It was always indispensable to take a side in the most unintelligible quarrels: neutrality was regarded as impiety. The party for which the prince declared, was always *orthodox*, and on that account, believed it had a right to exterminate all others: the orthodox in the church were those who had the power to exile, imprison, and destroy their adversaries. Lucifer Calaritanus, a most orthodox bishop, in several discourses addressed to the son of Constantine, did not scruple to tell the emperor himself that it was the duty of the orthodox to kill Constantius on account of his Arianism, which he called Idolatry; and for this he quoted Deut. xiii. 6., and I Maccab. i. 43, to v. 29 of c. ii.

The bishops, whom the puissance of an emperor had raised from the dust, soon became rebellious subjects; and, under pretence of maintaining their spiritual power, laboured to be independent of the sovereign, and even the laws of society. They maintained that princes themselves, "*being subjects of Christ*", ought to be subjected to the jurisdiction of his representatives on earth. Thus the pretended successors of some fishermen of Judea, whom Constantine had raised from obscurity arrogated to themselves the right of reigning over kings; and in this way the kingdom of heaven served to conquer the kingdoms of the earth.

Hitherto the Christians had been governed by bishops or chiefs independent of each other, and perfectly equal as to jurisdiction. This made the church an aristocratical republic; but its government soon became monarchical, and even despotical. The respect which was always entertained for

Rome the capital of the world, seemed to give a kind of superiority to the bishop or spiritual head of the Christians established there. His brethren, therefore frequently showed a deference to him, and occasionally consulted him. Nothing more was wanting to the ambition of the bishops of Rome, to advance the right they arrogated of dictating to their brethren, and to declare themselves the monarchs of the Christian church. A very apocryphal tradition had made Peter travel to Rome, and had also made this chief of the apostles establish his see in that city. The Roman bishop therefore, pretended to have succeeded to the rights of Simon Peter, to whom Jesus in the gospel had entrusted more particularly the care of feeding his sheep. He accordingly assumed the pompous titles of "*Successor of St. Peter, Universal Bishop, and Vicar of Jesus Christ.*" It is true these titles were often contested with him by the oriental bishops, too proud to bow under the yoke of their brother. But by degrees, through artifice, intrigue, and frequently violence, those who enjoyed the See of Rome, and prosecuting their project with ardor, succeeded in getting themselves acknowledged in the west as the heads of the Christian church.

Pliant and submissive at first to sovereigns, whose power they dreaded, they soon mounted on their shoulders; and trampled them under their feet when they were certain of their power over the minds of devotees rendered frantic by superstition. Then indeed they threw off the mask, gave to nations the signal of revolt, incited Christians to their mutual destruction, and precipitated kings from their thrones. To support their pride, they shed oceans of blood:

they made weak princes the vile sport of their passions, sometimes their victims and sometimes their executioners. Sovereigns, become their vassals, executed with fear and trembling the decrees Heaven pronounced against the enemies of the Holy See which had created itself the arbiter of faith. In fact, these inhuman pontiffs immolated to their God a thousand times more human victims than paganism had sacrificed to all its divinities.

After having succeeded in subduing the bishops, the head of the church, with a view to establish and preserve his empire inundated the states of the princes attached to the sect with a multitude of sabaltern priests and monks, who acted as his spies, his emissaries, and the organs which he employed in making known his will at a distance. Thus nations were deluged with men useless or dangerous. Some, under pretext of attaining Christian perfection, astonished the vulgar with a frantic life, denied themselves the pleasures of existence, renounced the world, and languished in the recesses of a cloister awaiting the death which their disagreeable pursuits must have rendered desirable. They imagined to please God by occupying themselves solely with prayers, and sterile and extravagant meditations; thus rendering themselves the victims of a destructive fanaticism. These, fools, whom Christianity esteems, may be considered as the victims and martyrs of the higher clergy, who take care never to imitate them.

Few however felt themselves inclined to aspire to this sublime perfection. Most of the monks, more indulgent, were content with renouncing the world, vegetating in solitude, languishing in sloth, and living in absolute

idleness at the expence of nations who toil. If some among them were devoted to study, it was only with the vain subtleties of an unintelligible theology calculated to incite disturbances in society. Others more active spread themselves over the globe; and, under pretence of preaching the gospel, preached up themselves, the interests of the clergy, and especially the submission due to the Roman pontiff, who was always their true sovereign. These emissaries, indeed, never had any other country than the church, any other master than its head, or any other interest than that of disturbing the state, in order to advance *the divine rights* of the clergy. Faithful in following the example of Jesus, they brought *the sword*, sowed discord, and kindled wars, seditions, persecutions, and crusades. They sounded the tocsin of revolt against all princes who were disagreeable or rebellious to the haughty tyrant of the church; they frequently employed the sacrificing knife of fanaticism, and plunged it in the hearts of kings; and, to make the *cause of God* prosper, they justified the most horrible crimes, and threw the whole earth into consternation.

Such, especially in latter times, were the maxims and conduct of an order of monks, who, pretending to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, assumed the name of his *Society*. Solely and blindly devoted to the interests of the Roman pontiff, they seemed to have come into the world for the purpose of bringing the universe under his chains. They corrupted the youth, the education of whom they wished exclusively to engross; they strove to restore barbarism, knowing well that want of knowledge is the greatest prop of superstition; they extolled ignorance and blind

submission; they depraved morals for which they substituted vain usages and superstitions, compatible with every vice, and calculated to suppress the remorse which crime occasions. They preached up slavery and unbounded submission to princes, who themselves were their slaves, and who consented to become the instruments of their vengeance. They preached rebellion and regicide against the princes who refused to bend under the odious yoke of the successor of St. Peter, whom they had the effrontery to declare *infallible*, and whose decisions they preferred above those of the universal church. By their assistance the pope became not only the despot, but even the true God of the Christians.

There were some, however, who ventured to protest against the violences, extortions, and usurpations of this spiritual tyrant. There were sovereigns who ventured to struggle with him; but in times of ignorance, the contest is always unequal between the temporal and spiritual power. At last preachers discontented with the Roman pontiff, opened the eyes of many; they preached *reformation*, and destroyed some abuses and dogmas which appeared to them that the most disgusting. Some princes seized this opportunity to break the chains wherewith they had been so long oppressed. Without renouncing Christianity, which they always regarded as a divine religion, they renounced Romish Christianity, which they considered a superstition corrupted through the avarice, influence, and passions of the clergy. Content with merely lopping off some branches of a poisoned tree, which its bitter fruits should have discovered, our *reformers* did not perceive that even [the](#)

principles of a religion, founded on fanaticism and imposture, must of necessity produce fanatics and knaves.

They did not observe that religion, which pretends to enjoy exclusively the approbation of the Most High, must be from its essence arrogant and proud, and become at last tyrannical, intolerant, and sanguinary. They did not perceive that the mania of proselytism, the pretended zeal for the salvation of souls, the passion of the priests for dominion over consciences, must, sooner or later, create devastation. Christianity *reformed*, pretending to resemble the pure Christianity of the first days of the church, produced fiery preachers, persons illuminated, and public incendiaries, who under pretence of *establishing the kingdom of Christ* excited endless troubles, massacres, and revolts. Christian Princes of every sect thought themselves obliged to support the decisions of their doctors. They regarded as infallible opinions which they themselves had adopted; they enforced them by fire and sword; and were everywhere in confederacy with their priests to make war on all who did not think like them.

We see, especially, the intolerant and persecuting spirit reigning in countries which continue subject to the Roman pontiff. It was there that priests, nurtured in the maxims of a spiritual despotism, dared with most insolence to tyrannize over minds. They had the effrontery to maintain that the prince could not without impiety dispense with entering into their quarrels, share their frenzy, and shed the blood of their enemies. Contrary to the express orders of Jesus, the emissaries of his vicar preached openly in his name persecution, revenge, hatred, and massacre. Their

clamors imposed on sovereigns; and the least credulous trembled at sight of their power, which they dared not curb. A superstitious and cowardly policy made them believe, that it was the interest of the throne to unite itself for ever with these inhuman and boisterous madmen. Thus princes, submissive to the clergy, and making common cause with them, became the ministers of their vengeance, and the executors of their will. These blind rulers were obliged to support a power the rival of their own; but they did not perceive, that they injured their own authority by delivering up their subjects to the tyranny and extortions of a swarm of men, whose interest it was to plunge them into ignorance, incite their fanaticism, control their minds, domineer over their consciences, make them fit instruments to serve their pride, avarice, and revenge. By this worthless policy, the liberty of thinking was proscribed with fury, activity was repressed, science was punished, and industry crushed, while morals were neglected, and their place supplied by traditional observances. Nations vegetated in inactivity; men cultivated only monastic virtues, grievous to themselves and useless to society. They had no other impulse than what their fanaticism afforded, and no other science than an obscure jargon of theology. Their understandings were constantly occupied with puerile disputes on mysterious subtleties, unworthy of rational beings. Those futile occupations engrossed the attention of the most profound genius, whose labors would have been useful if they had been directed to objects really interesting.

Under the despotism of priestcraft, nations were impoverished to foster, in abundance, in luxury, and often

in drunkenness, legions of monks, priests and pontiffs, from whom they derived no real benefit. Under pretence of supporting the intercessors with God, they richly endowed a multitude of drones, whose prayers and reveries procured only misery and dissensions. Education, entrusted throughout Christendom to base or ignorant priests, formed superstitious persons only, destitute of the qualities necessary to make useful citizens. The instructions they gave to Christians were confined to dogmas and mysteries which they could never comprehend; they incessantly preached evangelical morality; but that sublime morality which all the world applauds, and which so few practise, because it is compatible with the nature and wants of man, did not restrain the passions, or check their irregularities. When that Stoical morality was attempted to be practised, it was only by imbecile fanatics or fiery enthusiasts, whom the ardour of their zeal rendered dangerous to society. The saints of Christianity were either the most useless or most flagitious of men.

Princes, the great, the rich, and even the heads of the church, considered themselves excused from the literal practice of precepts and counsels which a God himself had come to communicate. They left Christian perfection to some miserable monks, for whom alone it seemed originally destined. Complaisant guides smoothed for others the way to Paradise, and, without bridling the passions, persuaded their votaries that it was sufficient to come at stated times *to confess* their faults to them, humble themselves at their feet, undergo the penances and ceremonies which they should impose, and especially make donations to the church, in

order to obtain from God remission of the outrages they committed on his creatures. By these means, in most Christian countries, people and princes openly united devotion with the most hideous depravity of manners, and often with the blackest crimes. There were *devout* tyrants and adulterers, oppressors and iniquitous ministers, courtiers without morals, and public depredators—all very *devout*. There were knaves of every kind displaying the greatest zeal for a religion, the ministers of which imposed easy expiations even on those who violated its most express precepts. Thus, by the cares of the spiritual guides of Christians, concord was banished from states; princes sunk into bondage; the people were blinded; science was stifled; nations were impoverished; true morality was unknown; and the most devout Christians were devoid of those talents and virtues which are indispensably necessary for the support of society.

Such are the immense advantages which the religion of Jesus has procured to the world! Such are the effects we see resulting from the gospel, or the *glad tidings* which the Son of God came in person to announce! To judge of it by its fruits, that is, according to the rule which the messiah himself has given, the incredulous find that Christianity was allegorically represented by the fig tree accursed. But those who have faith assure us that in the other world this tree will produce delicious fruits. We must therefore wait for them in patience, for everything evinces that [the great benefits promised by this religion are very little perceptible in the present world.](#)

There are, however, some who carry incredulity so far as to think that if there exists a God really jealous of his rights, he will confer no reward on those who are so impious as to associate with him a man, a Jew, and a Charlatan, and to pay him honors which are due only to the divinity. Indeed, in supposing that God is offended with the actions of his creatures, and concerns himself with their behaviour, he must be irritated at the odious conduct of many Christians who, under pretence of devotion and zeal, believe themselves permitted to violate the most sacred duties of nature of which they make the Deity the author.

It is, add our unbelievers, very difficult to calculate the duration of human extravagancies; but they flatter themselves that the reign of falsehood and error will terminate at some period, and give place to reason and truth. They hope that the nations and their chiefs will one day perceive the danger resulting from their prejudices; that they will blush at having prostituted their praises on objects deserving sovereign contempt; that they will regret the blood and treasure which baneful fables and reveries have cost them; and that they will be at last ashamed of having been the dupes and victims of a mass of romances, destitute of probability, at never possessing a more solid foundation than the astonishing credulity of men, and the astonishing impudence of those who preach them. These unbelievers venture at least a glimpse at a time when men, having become more sensible of their own interest, will acknowledge the truly barbarous folly of hating and tormenting themselves, and cutting one another's throats for obscure dogmas, puerile opinions, and ceremonially

unworthy of rational beings, and on which it is impossible to be ever unanimous. They even have the temerity to maintain that it is very possible that sovereigns and subjects may one day loathe a religion burdensome to the people, and producing real advantages only to the priests of a beggarly and crucified God. They think that the profane laity, if undeceived, could easily bring their priests back to the frugal life of the apostles or of Jesus, whom they ought to regard as a model at least; these unbelievers imagine that the ministers of the God of peace would be obliged to live more peaceably, and follow some occupation more honest than that of deceiving, and tearing to pieces the society which fosters them.

If it is demanded of us what can be substituted for a religion which at all times has produced effects pernicious to the happiness of the human race, we will bid men cultivate the **reason**, which, much better than absurd and deceptive systems, will advance their welfare, and make them sensible to the value of virtue. Finally, we will tell them with Tertullian, *'Why pain yourselves in seeking for a divine law when you have that which is common to mankind, and engraven on the tablets of NATURE'*.